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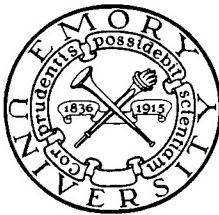
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A

PERFECT TREASURE.

AN INCIDENT IN THE EARLY LIFE OF
MARMADUKE DRAKE, ESQ.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,” “GWENDOLINE’S HARVEST,”
“FOUND DEAD,” ETC.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON :
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1870.

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TO

MRS. FREDERICK LEHMANN

THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY

DEDICATED.

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A PERFECT TREASURE.

AN INCIDENT IN THE EARLY LIFE OF MAR-
MADUKE DRAKE, ESQ.

CHAPTER I.

HERSHELL POINT.

MOST unfortunate persons are able to date their ruin from some trifling circumstance. The “lifer”-convict, sentenced to years of seclusion till he gets his ticket of leave—looks back with regret on his first robbery with violence, laments the day when he stole his first watch, which perhaps was, after all, only that called a hunting one (on account perhaps of its fatal facility for “running down”). If the poor fellow had but resisted the temptation to become its possessor, he might have sat on the bench (open to every British subject born with good lungs), instead of standing in the dock. Similarly, the wife of the French billiard-marker, once the flower of an English middle-class household, bewails

that moment of indiscretion when she first returned from her finger-tips the clandestine salute of the self-styled Marquis de St. Antoine, who lodged in the opposite second floor at Margate.

But why multiply examples? In every walk of life the fall can be traced to the first false step. I date my own condemnation to the literary profession from the day when I posted those *Lines to —*, to the editor of the *Sandiford Mercury*, and he yielded to my importunity at last (for I had sent him many a poem before), and published them. All young poets write *To —*, and all young prose-writers lay the scene of their stories “not a hundred miles from L——;” whether from motives of delicacy, or because they have no superfluous imagination to spare for the invention of names, I am unable, at this distance of time, to recollect; but the practice, I now feel, detracts from the interest of their stories. One cannot feel very much wrapped up in either people or places who can only boast of an initial letter, such as the “M or N” in the Baptismal Service.

Let me then here avoid that youthful error. My name and direction in full, at the period of which I write, was Marmaduke Drake, Esq., of Hershell Point, Hampshire; but I was not often addressed by that title, by reason of my tender years. I was more commonly called Master

Marmaduke, and even Master Marmy, though this latter I resented as a liberty. Sangaree Tannajee, my uncle's Hindu servant (a most important person in this history), was one of those who invariably called me "Master Marmy;" and in revenge I called him Sambo. Whether I devised this term of reproach by some subtle process, such as is used by commentators, out of the word Sangaree, which was his "front" name, or whether, dividing all mankind into two races, black and white, I dubbed him a nigger, I cannot recall to mind; but I know it made Sangaree Tannajee exceedingly angry to be called "Sambo," and that I often did it. I hated that Hindu with an intensity only known to boyhood, a period of life which resents difference of colour, of opinion, and even of taste, with ludicrous violence: and it is the fixed opinion of my riper years, that he, on his part, would have derived considerable pleasure from chopping off, one by one, all my fingers and toes, or roasting my juvenile carcass before a tardy fire. On the other hand, perhaps my imagination may have given his character a few uncharitable touches, inasmuch as he was my model ruffian, the lay-figure whom in my youthful compositions I invested with all the passions that defile the human breast; he was my "Mongol of the Red Hand," likewise my "Gory Bandit of the Apennines,"

which had appropriate scenery, borrowed from the really romantic features of the neighbourhood of Hershell Point. But for him there would have been no such creation as “Wildred the Half-caste,” a supposed convert to the principles of the Church of England, but who only used them the better to conceal his designs against the family of R——, residing unsuspectingly in Bengal, but eventually massacred by the natives to the slow music of tom-toms. I mention these works because they are novelties : they were composed between my ninth and my sixteenth year, and have never emerged from the modest retirement of a somewhat illegible manuscript. If any publisher, having effected his escape from Hanwell, should have undertaken to put forth the last-named romance, it would have occupied seven volumes quarto, and close printing too. Time was no object, at that period, with so much of it before me, and I did not spare my Uncle Braydon’s letter-paper.

Perhaps a few words here regarding my uncle and guardian, as well as proprietor of the house and grounds called Hershell Point, would be only respectful, and cannot be considered out of place. I was an orphan, and entirely dependent upon his generosity, which was great, nay, beyond his means. It seems to me that there are no such uncles nowadays. In our childhood,

the world appears to be composed of parents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, a great many cousins, and a few other people. It takes many years, unless we happen to be very poor, to convince us that the great majority of mankind are not personally interested in our well-being ; and Uncle Braydon, whom I shall never see again, unless I get to heaven, took care to keep such knowledge away from me. He was not rich, but he lived upon his own property, and always led me to believe that that would one day or other considerably improve. How this was to happen, was not specified, but it was somehow or other connected with, if not dependent on, Sangaree Tannajee. He had been my uncle's servant in the East Indies, and master and man had seen stormy times together, which in some degree no doubt accounted for their close attachment.

Theophilus Braydon had been no covenanted servant of John Company, sitting quietly under the pagoda tree, while the rupees dropped into his open hand, nor had he, as an officer, idled his time away in cantonments, while ennui and the climate gnawed his liver. He had attached himself, in what capacity I never knew, to the service of Her Highness the Begum of Bundelbad, a native princess notorious for her wealth, her atrocities, and her partiality to Europeans. How so kind-hearted

and agreeable an old fellow as Uncle Theo could have witnessed, far less endured, the tyranny of such an old harridan, for such she certainly was, used to excite my childish wonder ; but I have since heard the whole story. He was offered a command in her very irregular cavalry. The uniform, in combination with his very handsome appearance, rendered him irresistible in the eyes of the princess so “partial to Europeans.” Under pretence of his having a genius for accounts, of which he knew absolutely nothing, she made him steward of her household, and after a prolonged resistance, wedded him *vi et armis*, although she was nearly three times his age. I have a portrait of my aunt by marriage now lying before me, painted by a native artist ; and certain therefore, if he valued his head, to be at least no unflattering likeness. “Rich and rare are the gems she wears.” She has not, indeed, “a human thigh-bone in her hair,” because she has not enough capillary attraction to sustain such an ornament, but she has a ring of immense value through her nose. Her royal features are of a maple complexion, upon which circumstance she prided herself exceedingly (most of the ladies of her court being of a mahogany colour) ; and they shine exactly like a dining-room table that has just been hand polished. Her ears are of a truly regal size,

the enormous weight of their rich pendants depressing them below their shoulders. She has “as much gay gold about her middle as would buy half Northumberlee,” and, as I should imagine, even the whole of it. “Her feet beneath her petticoat like little mice peep in and out,” or rather they would do so if they were about a tenth of their size; as it is, they rather protrude than peep. The Begum of Bundelbad was, in fact, severely afflicted with elephantiasis. Except for these imperfections, she might perhaps have been a charming woman, but for the expression of her eyes, which was demoniacally wicked and cruel. It was her habit, Sambo once informed me, to cause all women whom she considered more beautiful than herself to be buried alive, their cries (*see Wildred the Half-caste*) being drowned by the noise of tom-toms. Fortunately she was very conceited, so the occurrence did not take place so often as one would imagine.

In the military service of this princess, as the steward of her household, and finally as her lawful husband, with the title of Maharajah, my dear uncle passed many years—the last ones, I fear, not altogether of honeymoon happiness. It was an ill-assorted union at the best. In friendship, difference of age is nothing :

We talked with open heart and tongue,
Affectionate and true ;
A pair of friends, though I was young,
And Matthew seventy-two.

But in love—my uncle being young, and the Begum seventy-two, for instance—this disparity became of consequence; there were earth-shakings, and then a final eruption and disruption; many brawls, and one frightful blow up, in which but too many innocent persons, were implicated. After my uncle's escape, which he accomplished in the company of his faithful servant, Sangaree Tannajee, the irritated princess planted a whole garden with her maids of honour, dibbled them in rows like scarlet-runners, to “make them remember” (such was her bitter phrase) the fugitive soldier's escapade. The ex-maharajah and his much reduced staff had to cut their way through some of his late subjects. His pension as king-consort was not, as you may easily imagine, continued after this occurrence; although, I believe, he did contrive that the quarrel should take place at the beginning of the quarter. But my dear uncle brought away with him much of what may be called his “personalty”—as many of the costly presents which the Begum had showered upon him in her misplaced passion as his horse could carry; and it was with the proceeds of the sale of these articles—sufficient to stock a fancy

bazaar—that Hershell Point was bought, and our household maintained.

I do not for a moment pretend that any sentiment of affection for that abominable old Begum prevented my uncle's marrying again after her death, or, for that matter, while she was alive. They had not been wedded in church, you see, or even at a register-office; that Bundelbad ceremony consisting, as it probably did, in the burning of cedar chips and the burial of young persons alive, would not have held water in any English court of law; but his experience of the married state had been such as to determine Uncle Theo to remain a bachelor to the end of his days; and, fortunately for me, he stuck to his determination. "I shall never marry, my dear boy," he once observed to me. "When I am gone, this little place will be your own, and I hope you will have a better income to keep it up with:" and then his eye would wander significantly towards Sangaree Tannajee pulling up onions in the garden, with an expression of countenance as though he was losing caste by the operation, and thereby consigning himself to perpetual perdition. It was impossible, in that moment of generous kindness, that I could ask my benefactor what that ill-looking old Hindu could possibly have to do with my future prospects; and when an opportunity

did offer itself of putting this question, Uncle Theo, instead of replying with his usual frankness, returned an evasive answer. "That Tannajee," said he, "is a Perfect Treasure, Marmy, and I would not lose him for ten thousand pounds."

I have wandered from the relation of my literary pursuits, as I wander from all else, at the mention of that mystery of our household—that great unintelligible Tannajee, whose story, to my mind, like Aaron's serpent, swallows up all other stories by virtue of its wonderful attraction.

Let me now endeavour to resume my own humble narrative.—I have said that I was a poet; nor was it to be wondered at that an impressionable youth, brought up among folks with so strange an experience of life as my uncle and his servant had had, and amid scenery so noble as that which surrounded our place of abode, should have acquired some romantic tastes, even though he should not have been born with them. I believe, however, that I was naturally endowed with something of the faculty divine of song, the germ of what might have ripened into worthy fruit, had sunshine and favouring breezes nourished it in maturity, as they did at first. I think so now, but I felt quite convinced of it in the days of those *Lines to ——*.

What golden days they were, from the breezy morn, when I arose and ran down to the shore, leaping from rock to rock, to the calm summer night, when I lay awake, watching the broad path of the moon upon the waves, and listening to their dreamy melody ! Hershell Point was, as its name implies, a narrow headland, stretching far into the sea. Upon one side, the ocean lay illimitable, without hint of land, although the wizard clouds would often shape themselves on the horizon into wild mountain ranges ; but on the other it was bounded, although a great way off, by tall white cliffs. The sea-breezes never died, but whispered soft and cool upon the calmest day ; and in the wintry weather raged and roared, especially if they set from the south-west, like let-loose demons. The coast at that time (for a light-house has been set up since upon the very site of our cottage) was strewed with wreck on mornings after storm. The neighbouring burial-ground (there was no church), which, small as it was, would have sufficed for the needs of many generations of the scanty native population, was filled with graves of shipwrecked strangers. Many and many a time as I have been walking on the golden sands, when the waves, after a night of furious passion, were glittering with ten thousand smiles, and breaking into laughter on the beach—have I seen, hud-

dled up above high-water line, some shapeless form, which once was man or boy, and have straightway run up the “cripple” path—the ladder cut in the steepest part of the cliff, but the shortest way to the village—to let the sexton know that he was wanted. The incident was too common to terrify me, but I had a morbid horror of such spectacles, and fled from them. Still oftener, in the dead of night, I have been awakened by the boom of guns, and knew that one of the vast fleet of ships which every day passed by us with their unknown companies upon their unknown way, would never complete its journey, but would give our coast its timbers, and our bay its dead. There was small hope for any vessel that once struck upon that fair but inhospitable shore, and especially at night. My uncle, kindly soul, never failed, however, to give his utmost aid. While I was still wondering whether I indeed heard guns or only the roaring wind, he would often enter my chamber dressed, and bid me hasten to the village, and bring what help I could, while the Hindu and himself went down to the shore.

It was to Hershell Point, from its position, that the news of such disasters was always carried first, for the hamlet lay inland. Although its people were mainly fisher-folk they obeyed my summons eagerly enough; I

do not say from greed, nor yet entirely from philanthropy ; their motives were mixed. They would save life if they could ; but they would also save property, with the intention of keeping it for themselves. Their cottage-furniture, or at least what was best of it, was mainly provided in this manner ; their upholsterers, so to speak, were Ship, Sea, Wind, & Co., who, moreover, dealt in miscellaneous goods of all sorts. At one time we were glutted with sponges, a cargo of which, from the West Indies, was discharged in this summary manner without invoice ; at another, oranges and lemons bobbed up and down upon the surface of our little cove as plentifully as air bubbles. Some sorts of goods suffered greatly in the process of delivery ; but there was really no reason for the bitter complaints that ensued on such occasions, since we got them all for nothing.

Hershell folks had been all smugglers in the last generation, but in my time there was but little of that illicit commerce. The legends of “the Free-traders,” as they called themselves, were probably more romantic than their deeds had ever been ; and to know that a “good run” had been effected in this or that adjacent cove, not without bloodshed, or that the great cavern in Sandcliff had been once a dépôt for brandy and lace, added to the

imaginative attractions of the neighbourhood. Similarly, these wrecks were almost more terrible to think of—to be awake while those minute-guns boomed, and picture the calamity for one's self—than to witness ; so little of them could generally be seen by reason of the fury of the waves and the force of the tempest. They were close at hand, for it was on the reef below the Point that they came ashore ; but the blinding spray shut most of the sad sight out, and the thunder of the breakers drowned all other sounds. Feeble lights would show themselves on board the doomed ships, only to be extinguished by the next wave ; figures running hither and thither, or lashed to the rigging, with tossing arms ; and then, when some monster wave whelmed all, a single desolate cry, which, amid that elemental strife, sounded but as the whine of a seagull.

Such incidents, such memories as these, had something of melodrama in them as well as of pathos : and they impressed my youthful mind accordingly.

I had heard stories of peril and combat from the lips of one who had himself been engaged in such scenes. I had myself witnessed spectacles, any one of which might form the *pièce de résistance* in a full-grown man's reminiscences, while children of my own age were elsewhere digging sand-heaps with wooden spades, or hunting for

common objects of the sea-shore with a pail and a magnifying-glass. It is no wonder, therefore, and no feather in my cap at all, that it might have been said of me at fifteen years of age that "young Edwin was no vulgar boy." If I had been so, I must have been born with such a natural tendency for the commonplace as to almost amount to genius. Books and magazines, which I devoured, were the only links which connected me with what is called the world. I knew nothing of what others of my own age knew—no Greek nor Latin, no cricket nor football. I had never been on horseback in my life—had never enjoyed a tuck-out at a pastry-cook's. On the other hand, I could climb—not trees—for we had no trees to be called such, but cliffs, like a chamois-hunter; I could run swifter than that "best pony in the county," which belongs to every schoolboy whose father can afford to keep it; I could swim like a fish, and dive like one of those long-throated cormorants which haunted Hershell Reef at low-water. I lived in the sea and the open air. The martins who had their nest under the eaves above my bed-room window were my chamberlains to call me in the summer mornings, and I was commonly up and out soon after sunrise. It was a grand thing to have the world all to myself—not a creature on the downland above the cliff-top, nor yet on

the broken ground, all rock and foliage, that lay between it and the beach ; not even a sheep or a cow, as would often be seen later in the day, standing statue-like on the summit of some solitary eminence, clear cut against the sky !

It is only bird and insect life that are astir in the matin prime. How solemn, although vague and inarticulate, is the lesson that Nature teaches us at such a time in that great out-door school of hers—how different from what is preached and taught in chapel and seminary ! We seem to be like him of old who walked alone with God in the garden. It might be the first morning that ever was made.

I was not without religious culture ; a loving mother had lived long enough to implant those principles in my childish breast which had made her death-bed (save for her solicitude on my account) like the setting off upon a pleasure-cruise ; but besides that, I had the devotional impulse which belongs to the poetic temperament, and although quite unaware how the world looked outside my Eden, I felt grateful to Providence for having placed me where I was. My uncle Theo, despite his name, was no theologian, but he encouraged me to believe all I ever heard from my mother's lips, to do all she had enjoined upon me, and to cherish her me-

mory. A beautiful loving face, with tearful hazel eyes, and soft brown hair, is all the picture ; but it hangs in that portrait-gallery of the past, for which every earthly house not built with hands has room, the tenderest and best remembered still of all. I fear her history was not a happy one, but I am not acquainted with its details ; she has long been at rest from all troubles, and reaps the promised harvest of God's golden grain.

I think it was her sorrows that first moved my uncle's heart towards me ; he always spoke of her with inexpressible pity and tenderness. We needed his protection sorely ; indeed, I have a dim recollection (although this may not be trustworthy) that we sought it of him at Hershell Point on foot ; but, at all events, he had sheltered us both for years ; and when she left us for the churchyard on the cliff, he filled her place towards me as well as he could, as also that of the father whom I never knew. Thus, in a vague and desultory manner, have I pictured the home of my boyhood and its surroundings, just as they recur to my mind, disconnectedly and vaguely enough, but not without a certain harmonious completeness too, like the chords of a harp struck by the wayward wind.



CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST LOVE.

DOUBTLESS, other boys immured in school-rooms, and kept close to their books, would have gladly left them for such delights as mine ; while, on the other hand, I, to whom all days were alike holidays, was intensely fond of reading. I do not doubt but that at sixteen years old I had read more English fiction and English poetry than any lad of my own age at public school or private. From Mary Ann Radcliffe to G. P. R. James ; from Shakspeare to Tennyson—I had read all that I could lay my hands on. I had quite exceptional opportunities for this sort of study. In a certain little town six miles away (and yet that which lay nearest to us), dwelt one Mrs. Eleanor Blunt, whose name was once a household word among all

readers, although the present generation hears of it only now and then. She had built herself a charming little cottage close by the sea, all out of the proceeds of her works, and kept herself, an attached old maid-servant or two, and a pony and chaise, by her diligent pen. The knowledge of these circumstances had always excited in me the profoundest veneration ; my enthusiasm was ready laid, like a housemaid's fire, so that it is not to be wondered at that when chance gave me an opportunity, when quite a small boy, of becoming personally acquainted with her, I fell in love with her at once. Our ages were more disproportionate than those of my uncle and the Begum had been ; but my devotion was of a more Platonic kind. She had seemed to me to be like some celestial body seen afar, whose orbit was altogether beyond my humble sphere, although I was not without a secret hope that my literary talents might some day attract her sublime regards. I was always picturing for myself some success in literature which should bring Mrs. Eleanor Blunt over to Hershell, to make the acquaintance of her gifted young neighbour, whereas our acquaintance was destined to be brought about in an altogether different manner.

I had been strolling along our cliff-road so far as where it met the main highway, one afternoon, when

I suddenly heard a jingling of wheels, and there flew by me a small vehicle, with a tiny old lady in it, drawn by an audacious little pony at full gallop. Confident that a person of her age and sex could not be driving at this speed for a wager, and also perceiving that she was clutching the splash-board instead of the reins, I started in pursuit. I could at that time have run down an antelope (in the shafts of a four-wheeled chaise), so that it did not at all exhaust my energies to catch and stop the pony.

“Thank you, young gentleman,” said the old lady in a sharp squeaky voice : “you have got good legs, and likewise lungs.” It was those personal qualities, then, and not my style as a British classic, which first drew forth Mrs. Eleanor Blunt’s approbation. I knew the famous old lady at once. The diminutive figure, the huge head, the snow-white locks, the bright, black, beady eyes had been made familiar to me by her portraits. I regarded her with undisguised admiration. Here was the individual who had won the hearts of an entire generation—nay, who had moved old and young alike to smiles and tears : she was the prose-poet of the country ; the narrator of village joys and sorrows ; the word-painter of woods and fields, and yet she had not appealed in vain even to the dull ears of fashion, but had filled the two

greatest London theatres, and that at the same time, by her stirring dramas.

“Perhaps, young gentleman,” said she in a voice like that of Punch, but nodding very good-naturedly, “when this gratuitous exhibition is over—when you have stared at me to your heart’s content, you will just turn my pony’s head round, and fasten his curb.—My dear little *Proud-foot* would never have run away, would he,” enquired she of the pony coaxingly, “but that his curb came undone?”

The little creature (whose curb was quite as it should be) shook his head, snorted, pawed with his fore-foot, and answered, as far as pantomime could: “Yes, I would, and I’ll do it again.” It was quite impossible to misunderstand him.

“Madam,” said I, with my best air, “it will give me the utmost pleasure to see you safe to Sandiford—to drive you thither, if you will permit me.” I had never taken a pair of reins into my hands in my life; but I could have driven a fiery griffin with packthread, for the chance of a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Eleanor Blunt.

“You’re a good boy,” said she, making room for me on the little seat, “and a kind-hearted one too, to be so careful of an old woman. Just look to the traces, and then jump in. He’s the quietest pony in the world when the

trace does not get loose, and vex him—ar’n’t you, *Proudfoot*?—Well, and what school are you at, my young friend?”

“I have never been to school at all, Madam.”

“What a very lucky boy!” smiled the old lady. “Never been stuffed with fusty, musty learning, eh? Never been caned? Never been kept in during the fine weather? Never learned to read, perhaps?”

“Oh yes, Ma’am, and to write too,” remarked I with meaning, for I wished, above all things, to bring the conversation round to literature, and eventually to my manuscript works.

“Ah, that’s bad,” said the old lady, shaking her head. “Now, if you had learned to drive instead—you as nearly tipped us over that heap of stones as near could be—I should have liked you a great deal better.—What’s that sticking out of your pocket? A book. Let me look at it! Shelley’s Poems—and dog-leaved too! Oh, this is very bad indeed—*Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*. You read that, do you?—Give me the reins, young gentleman; I am not going to trust my neck to a lad of your age who reads *Alastor*!”

My boyhood had been, I verily believe, a tearless one, but I was within a very little of bursting into tears at this threatened indignity from hands I so revered.

Her bright eyes instantly perceived my emotion.

“I am a very uncivil old woman,” said she, “and quite deserve to have my neck broken ; but I mistook your character altogether, my boy, on account of your having such good legs and lungs. It is very unusual for folks to be strong and clever too, else the hippopotamus would be king of us all. A boy that could catch *Proudfoot* when at full speed—there’s the reins under his tail ; he’s the quietest pony in the world, except when that happens—ought to be all muscles, and wind, and mischief. I thought you were all muscles, and wind, and mischief, and I apologise.—Now, tell me all about yourself. You have no father, of course ; but you’ve a mother, who makes an idol of you, eh ?”

“Alas, no, Madam ; I am an orphan.”

“Well, that’s just my case,” said the old woman cheerfully. “*Proudfoot* is as near a relative as I have in the world. That means, you know,” added she in explanation, “that I have got none ; neither chick nor child. I had at one time a first-cousin once removed, but he has been removed altogether these thirty years.—Now, come, *you* are not so much alone in the world, my young Alastor, as all that comes to ?”

“Oh no, Madam ; I live at Hershell Point with my Uncle Braydon.”

"What ! is the ex-maharajah your uncle?" exclaimed the old lady with twinkling eyes ; and I saw that her fat little frame was convulsed with inward laughter. Doubtless, she was thinking of some gossip of the neighbourhood respecting the deceased Begum of Bundelbad ; but I did not understand that at the time, and I did not like her laughing at Uncle Theo.

"My uncle is the best man in the world, Madam," said I with spirit ; "and if you have heard anything to his discredit, I will answer for it that it is a—that your informant, I mean, has been mistaken."

"Say what you were going to say, young gentleman—say that it is a great big bouncing lie," said the old lady approvingly. "I like you for your sticking up for your good uncle, and telling me (by implication) that I was a scandalous old frump, a thousand times more than for your carrying Shelley in your pocket. A good honest heart, my dear, is better worth having than the most tender sensibility." And from that moment, until her death, which did not take place for many years, Mrs. Eleanor Blunt always called me "my dear."

She gave me a hearty welcome at her pretty cottage, which, although close to the outskirts of Sandiford, stood in a very bower of fuchsias and roses, all alone by the sea. But it was the inside of the little house that pleased

me most. Up stairs and down stairs, and (quite literally) in my lady's chamber, the walls were lined with books. Paper and paint were rendered unnecessary ; the very doors were in some cases whole shelves of books that moved upon a pivot. They were almost all presentation copies. Indeed, I remember Mrs. Blunt once telling me that she had gone into the town “and bought a book,” with the air of a person who had been guilty of an inexcusable extravagance. “No, my dear,” she would squeak like a little white mouse, “I have written too many books myself to buy such things.” But she was in reality a very glutton at reading, and it was a wonder how her eyes kept so bright and keen. She did not so much “devour” books—a phrase which gives one some idea, however rude, of digesting them—as “consume” them in broad acres, and with incredible velocity, like a prairie fire. It is true she never read a “hard” book. The metaphysicians, to whom she would refer as “gentlemen who did not know what to think,” stood untouched upon her top-shelves ; the divines, for whom she had a great respect—“I would do anything for them except read them, my dear”—were kept in a glass case. Her especial weakness was for French Memoirs, such as those of Madame de Crequi, and even of much queerer ladies. “They don't hurt me, my dear, but they might hurt you ;

and, therefore, never ask me for one of them." But she was familiar with the whole range of English literature, and her memory was prodigious. She had met almost everybody who, according to my then standard, was worth meeting, and had something characteristic to tell of each. I am obliged to confess that she rather destroyed my illusions respecting some of them. She had the sharpest tongue that ever I listened to either of man or woman, and the grasshopper shrillness of her tiny voice added piquancy to her satire. She would often conclude a disparaging anecdote concerning some living literary idol of mine with : "So don't believe in him, my dear, because, you see, he's a rogue."

"But you destroy my faith in all my heroes, Mrs. Blunt," I once remonstrated.

"Yes, my dear ; but you must remember that I have been *valet de chambre* to all of them."

I did not half understand her at that time ; her wit was altogether too subtle for me ; but I comprehended enough, when she abstained from epigram, to find her even then a most charming companion. She delighted in talk, and I dare say my simple enthusiasm (and perhaps I should add, my genuine admiration for herself) made my juvenile society very palatable to her. The good people of Sandiford did not much frequent Seaview Cottage. They were

no great loss, from an intellectual point of view, perhaps ; but I think the genial old lady would have enjoyed their gossip, had she been favoured with it. Unhappily, however, the activity of her pen had caused her tongue to fall into disuse, The Sandifordians having come upon certain very life-like descriptions of commonplace people in their local authoress's works, were seized with the idea that she had satirised them in particular ; whereas it is my opinion that she never took a single "character" from that place, nor did I ever hear her speak an ill word against one of her neighbours. Nevertheless, I was myself so prejudiced by what I heard concerning her Sandiford sketches, that when she expressed her intention of calling at Hershell Point on the ensuing day to tell my uncle what a perfect nephew he might have, if he would only teach him to drive, I blurted out involuntarily : " But you won't put the ex-maharajah into a book, dear Mrs. Blunt, will you ? "

Then I saw her angry for the first, and almost the last time.

" No, my young friend," said she in a voice like concentrated bitter aloes, " I never pepper small game." A remark, however, which peppered me, I remember, most uncommonly.



CHAPTER III.

MRS. BLUNT'S VISIT.

N the ensuing day, Mrs. Eleanor Blunt drove *Proudfoot*—in whose steadiness and decorum she had, ever, the same misplaced confidence—over to Hershell Point, which was called by those in the immediate neighbourhood “the Point,” and joked upon by my new acquaintance accordingly. She always complained with respect to us that it was impossible to come “straight to the Point;” and called the series of inclines that led to the house from the upper cliff *Voyages en Zig-zag*, after the French book of that name, which she lent me, and with the illustrations of which I was hugely delighted. My uncle and she became great friends, to my extreme satisfaction, and not a little to my surprise. I had felt an apprehension that this *littérateur* and book-

worm would not have properly appreciated my kind protector, who rarely read anything but the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, and had pronounced one of Mrs. Blunt's own *chefs-d'œuvre*, which I had once persuaded him to attempt, as "fudge." I did not then understand that "character" is more attractive to a person of genius—and such Mrs. Eleanor Blunt decidedly was—than any mere sympathies of taste.

She was charmed with Uncle Theo's modest yet perfectly independent air, his natural talk, his manly carriage; and he, on his part, received with something more than courtesy a lady who did not spare her praises of his nephew. I will never own, even to myself, that Mrs. Blunt was insincere; but although no flatterer, she was an adept in the art of pleasing. "I had expected," she confessed to me as I accompanied her part of the way home that evening, "to have found in the ex-maharajah a sort of Dugald Dalgetty; instead of that, he is a Bayard: he could surely have never picked up that stately courtesy at the court of Bundelbad with that wonderful woman." Here she became a little hysterical, and had to wipe her eyes. The fact is, I had shown her the portrait of my eccentric aunt-in-law, not without some pardonable pride; for surely if to be illegitimately descended from royalty is a matter for self-complacency, how much

more to be lawfully, although indirectly, connected with it. "You need never fear," she went on, perceiving in me some discomfort, "my putting that guardian angel of yours into a book. Such a life-history as his could be only fitly written in lively French. And yet," mused she, "no Frenchman would understand him. If there is something of Murat and Warren Hastings about that capital relative of yours, there is more of Uncle Toby."

"That is quite true, Madam," said I gravely.

She looked at me with a comical air, as though she would have said: "You are young for Sterne, Master Marmaduke," but uttered no remark. She was desirous at that time, if not of discouraging my literary proclivities, at least of not forcing them into premature activity. She had had too much experience of juvenile geniuses to take them at their self-estimated value; and she had too kindly a regard for me to assist, without some proof of my fitness for that calling, in my "devoting myself to literature"—a phrase that has more of its primary Jugger-nautish signification about it than neophytes are apt to imagine. I am bound to say that while discussing my favourite branches of reading in a manner that could not but enhance them in my eyes, she parried every leading question that I put to her with respect to the profession

of letters, and when she spoke of it in the abstract, always called it "that heart-breaking business."

Still, when I at last did put the question : "Then why have embraced it yourself, good Mrs. Blunt?" it was difficult even for her to reply to me, boy as I was : "Because I felt I was fit for it ; whereas you, Master Marmaduke, are not fit, being a goose." She only gave a great sigh, and said : "You may bring your manuscripts to-morrow, my dear—all the best of them, that is—but I shall never like your works one-half so much as I like *you*"—which was, I thought, but a left-hand sort of compliment.

The selection thus imposed upon me proved a very invidious one, although my own genius was alone concerned. If one of my precious manuscripts excelled in imagination or fancy, another had the pre-eminence in pathos. Fortunately for Mrs. Blunt, *Wildred the Half-caste* was too bulky to be put in my pocket, or perhaps even in her pony-carriage, had I borrowed that equipage for the purpose. I only took a specimen chapter or two to give her an idea of my more elevated style, half-a-dozen shorter narratives, and about ten pounds weight of poems, all in a knapsack.

The expression of my talented friend's face as I exhibited these works *en masse* upon her drawing-room carpet

—for the table could not hold them—would have been a study for Gustave Doré. “Don’t you think you could winnow them just a little more?” enquired she pathetically; whereupon I did take out three or four exquisite poems, although it was like parting with my heart’s blood.

“You shall read these afterwards,” said I, “if you like the rest.”

“Thanks, my dear,” said she with gravity; but I saw from the motion of her shoulders that she was laughing; the dear little lady being so plump, that mirth very literally “moved” her—it set her wabbling like *blanc-mange*.

In the course of that week, Mrs. Eleanor Blunt passed judgment upon my literary efforts. It was her custom to write to me almost every day. I never knew anyone at once so skilful with her pen and so willing to use it. Famous authors are generally chary of their epistolary favours; they do not like to write for nothing when they can earn a shilling a line; or perhaps it would be more charitable to say that they have enough of professional writing to tire them, and are obliged to cut short their communications to their friends. But Mrs. Blunt, though one of the most prolific of English writers, wrote more private letters than any of those poor idle women who suffer from *cacoethes scribendi*, and they were long letters too; although being

written in a microscopic hand ("Which I practised for cheapness' sake, my dear, in times when the cost of postage was very heavy"), they occupied but little space.

In yonder desk lie at least three hundred of them, marvels of wit and sense ; and one lock of snow-white hair from her wrinkled forehead, which I value more than all. Yes ; here it is :

And my own breath
Stirs its thin outer threads, as though beside
The living head I stood in honoured pride,
Talking of lovely things that conquer death.
She pressed it oftentimes, and underneath
Ran her fine fingers.

But to my story. Her verdict was passed by letter.

"I have read your manuscripts, dear Marmaduke," wrote she, "and some of them with an interest quite independent of the writer. They are very unequal, though the worst of them have some redeeming points. There is nothing so good as to enable me to say : 'This boy will make his mark.' The very best of the poems is but an echo. Still, they are better than Lord Byron's were at the same age ; and, in my humble opinion, we have had no such poet in this country in my time as Byron. I knock you down with one hand, you see, and pick you

up with the other, just as the National schoolmaster here boxes his boys' ears (for I have seen him do it). The fact is, you have placed a responsibility on me which I must shift in part from my own shoulders to those of your good uncle ; it is too grave for me to bear alone. If the promise exhibited in what you have written were less than it is—that is, considerably less—I should say : ‘Give up this cherished idea of a literary life, and be content with an ordinary calling ;’ if the promise were only a little more, I should not hesitate to say : ‘You are born for letters, and will be a successful writer.’ But as it is, the matter, being in doubt, becomes a mere question of finance. I know nothing of your pecuniary prospects, my dear ; indeed, you seem to know nothing about them yourself. (Do not suppose that is in your favour ; it is a popular error that assigns as an attribute of genius an inaptitude for business affairs. It is quite possible—though, of course, this is not your case—to be stupid at everything.) Well, you must go to your uncle, and find out what is likely to be your future position. If you are always to possess a moderate independence, or even a small one, then you may become a literary man, as the loose phrase goes, and not trouble yourself about another pursuit. But if you are to be a poor man, or to be left poor when that good friend of yours shall have departed

(a sort of friend that is very rare, Marmaduke), take the advice of one who has been exceptionally fortunate in a very risky trade, and eschew literature as a calling altogether. You have more than once heard me call it a ‘heart-breaking business,’ and I was born tough. I never much cared for what people said of me, and still less of what they wrote. But *you*, my poor Marmaduke !

Who killed John Keats?
I, said the *Quarterly*,
With my Review so slaughterly,
I killed John Keats.

And John Keats, whom I knew well, had the hide of a rhinoceros compared with yours, which is but goldbeaters’ skin. Yes, you’ll be fool enough to read all that the reviewers say about you, and to be tortured by them. I warn you, without forbidding you, as St. Paul warns young ladies upon the subject of matrimony ; you will have trouble in the flesh. Yes, my dear, this in any case ; and though your union with literature should be the happiest on record. But this inconvenience is nothing compared with the combination of poverty and failure. My good boy, let me entreat of you to have another string to your bow, to have another weapon to fight the battle of life with beside the pen, if you are destined to be poor. The most successful writer of any age has left it on record that ‘literature is a good staff, but a very bad crutch ;’

and he never wrote a more pregnant sentence. I paraphrase it, for fear of misinterpretation. It is a perilous thing to trust to this profession of letters for sole support, although it may supplement an income very agreeably. Perilous? Nay, the stage itself is not a more wretched calling (and I well know the wretchedness of *that*), nor one in which it is more difficult for the aspirant to undeceive himself. The author and the actor who have mistaken their professions are scarce to be convinced by starvation itself. I do not wish, however, to overstate the case : you may not starve, but you will certainly not carry the heights of Literature by assault. You will wait outside in the cold, it may be, for years ; your manuscripts unaccepted, or, if accepted, ill paid—perhaps unpaid. When Shakspeare talks of the ‘insolence of office, and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes,’ he must have had a prescient eye to editors. My *Hearths and Homesteads*—the best work of its day, I may say *now*, I suppose—was refused by six of these critical gentlemen, and eventually made the fortune of a publisher. Now, constant rejection, which is only galling to the man of means, is to the poor man death. I hope, my dear lad, I have thus written enough to warn you against going into such a profession as that of letters without well counting the cost. As to other callings, your uncle is, of

course, the proper counsellor, and you will be guided by him.—Always your affectionate well-wisher,

“ELEANOR BLUNT.”

This courteous communication was a sad blow to me ; for, conscious of my own merits, I had expected a decision of a very different sort. I say “decision,” because it was at Uncle Theo’s desire, as much as my own, that I had placed those ill-appreciated manuscripts in the hands of Mrs. Blunt, and her verdict, it was agreed, was to be final. “You can scarcely be an unprejudiced judge of your own productions, Marmy,” he had replied to me when I spoke of becoming an author ; “and as for Sangaree and myself, we are no critics. But this good lady at Sandiford is in a position to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the question : let her see all that you have written—all those effusions which seem so excellent to yourself, and so unintelligible, because I am so stupid, to me—and let us hear her advice, and follow it.”

My heart had yearned towards my generous, simple-hearted guardian as he thus spoke. Notwithstanding certain hints of an Indian Civil Service appointment, which had from time to time dropped from his lips, he would, it was thus made evident, permit me to follow the bent of my own inclination, if I were only pronounced by competent authority adapted for the calling of letters,

and I had had no doubt of a favourable verdict. It was true that my manuscript works, both "prose" and "worse," as the wit has termed such, had seen the inside of several publishers' establishments, and of half the magazine offices in England, without the least sign of acceptance: some had been sent back to me with courteous frigidity, with meaningless "Compliments" or "Thanks," and the rest I had a shrewd suspicion were feeding editorial fires. But I comforted myself with what I had read somewhere concerning the exclusiveness of literary cliques, the preference shown to the staff of a periodical over volunteers, and also with the charitable reflection, that it was only natural that so novel and striking a writer as "Leo" (for I was even fool enough to use a *nom de plume*) should meet at first with envious obstruction.

But I had entertained no apprehension that so excellent a judge of literature as Mrs. Eleanor Blunt would fail to see my peculiar merits, and her shortcoming in this respect disappointed me bitterly. It was impossible in her case to attribute it to jealousy, though I did try to reflect that successful persons are generally inclined to discourage others from attempting obstacles which they have themselves surmounted. I was driven to extract what comfort I could from the letter itself. If it was not decisively in favour of my own plans, it was by no means

against them. Perhaps Uncle Theo could allow me, without inconvenience, a sufficient income to maintain me until my literary merits were acknowledged, without the necessity of my becoming an Indian Judge—a position, by-the-bye, much easier attained at that time than it is at present. Perhaps—but perhaps not. I was as ignorant of my pecuniary position as Mrs. Blunt had hinted ; I had always felt a delicacy in enquiring about it. I only knew that to Uncle Theo I must be indebted for my future maintenance, as I had so long been for my past. We had never spoken upon the subject at all, except on that one occasion when he had said : “When I am gone, Marmy, this little place will be your own,” and had alluded in that mysterious manner to Tannajee. When I carried Mrs. Blunt’s letter into my guardian’s room, I knew that some explanation must needs be made, some understanding come to, and I felt myself grow now hot, now cold, not—to do me justice—from anxiety as to my own prospects, but from the unpleasantness of having to enter upon so delicate a subject at all. It was hard to feel myself possessed of so sensitive an organisation, and yet to be denied the more advantageous qualities of genius. I had half a mind to give up my favourite project altogether, and to throw myself at the ex-maharajah’s feet with : “Uncle, I am a born fool ; and ready to be a judge in India.”



CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST HINT OF THE SECRET.

MY uncle was in his study, a chamber, however, which scarcely possessed a single book, though it had a desk and an inkstand. Its chief article of furniture was his turning lathe, at which he would work for hours in constructing a number of ingenious articles in sandal-wood and ivory, vast quantities of which he had brought home with him from the East. Our little drawing-room was so lavishly furnished with these ornaments that it looked like a bazaar. Sangaree Tannajee passed almost as much of his time in this department as his master, under pretence of assisting him; but the obese Hindu had in reality no more experience of mechanics than I had of making chupatties.

He would sit smoking my uncle's cheroots upon the carpetless floor, with his legs folded under him, and gaze with lack-lustre eyes at the flying chips and spinning wheel until he fell asleep. It will doubtless seem very indecorous that Sambo should sit smoking, with his hands before him, while his master toiled, but the fact is there were no bounds to that fat scoundrel's idleness and impertinence. He did just what he liked of the work of the house, and that was almost nothing; he treated me with studious insolence ("Master Marmy" was the best name he had for me), and my uncle with at least a great want of respect. In public, indeed—if I may so term the few occasions when we had company at "the Point"—he used to affect an Eastern servility towards his master (although even this thin polish was gradually wearing off), and salaamed and sahibed in a most ludicrous manner; but when we were alone his tone was disagreeably familiar, and was growing more so daily.

On the present occasion, when I entered the study with Mrs. Blunt's open letter in my hand, Sangaree was seated on the floor as usual, putting his lazy lips to his cheroot just sufficiently often to keep it alight, and lolling his head slowly from side to side like a sick elephant. Uncle Theo, with his coat off, and his pleasant face shining with toil, was listening to him attentively, while

the other spoke a few languid words in Hindustanee ; and though I knew nothing of their import, it was impossible to misunderstand the self-complacent and offensive air with which they were delivered. It was not the first time, nor the second, that I had known him thus repay his master's good-nature and forbearance with insolence. I had hitherto, however, abstained from interference (although it must be owned that Master Marmy took up the cudgels very readily when his own dignity was similarly outraged) ; but now, being vexed, to begin with, thanks to Mrs. Blunt's verdict, I fairly lost my temper with the rascal. "Sambo," said I roughly, "get out ; I wish to speak to my uncle in private. Do you hear, you fat lout ? Get out ! "

I dare say my manner was rather offensive, as indeed I had meant it to be ; but I don't think it was that which annoyed him, so much as my touching the fattest part of his fat person with the tip of my toe. He leaped up with an agility for which I should not have given him credit, and uttered some forcible ejaculations in his native dialect. I believe he also attempted to strike me ; but I am not quite sure of that. My uncle was between us in an instant. I had never seen him in a passion before. I could henceforward picture to myself (which I had been hitherto unable to do) how Uncle Theo, sword in hand,

at the head of the Begum's irregular cavalry, had looked ; or cutting his way through the said troopers when he flew from the embraces of my aunt-in-law. It was not with me that he was thus enraged, but with the Hindu. At first, Tannajee cowered before the storm, and looked, as I have no doubt he was, exceedingly frightened. Then, as the rain of epithets slackened, he began to pluck up a little, to grumble, to gesticulate in his turn ; and then to pat his stomach. With Sambo, as with the gorilla, this curious pantomimic action was always indicative of menace ; it was somehow a sign, too, that he was growing absolutely dangerous, for it always had its effect upon his master. Upon this occasion, I noticed, with no small sense of humiliation, that my uncle's manner at once became grave and conciliatory. If I had had my way, I would have treated the rascal's ill-temper in a very different fashion. I felt like a planter in the Southern States with respect to this refractory Sambo, or rather as an Englishman in India regarded Hindus during the Mutiny.

It is recorded that a cruel sepoy once underwent at the hands of our soldiers the following medical treatment : they gave him all the blue packets in a seidlitz-powder box, and then all the white ones ; and I should like to have tried that cooling prescription

upon Mr. Sangaree Tannajee whenever he patted his stomach.

I am afraid I may be thought arbitrary and tyrannical, but the fact is it was this scoundrel who was the tyrant of the whole house. He used to swear at Martha the cook, until he made her cry—though she was a tough one too—and absolutely, on one occasion, broke her own broom over the shoulders of our poor little maid-of-all-work, Nancy. His excuse, in the latter case, was (appropriately enough) that he was under the influence of bhang—which was his general name for any sort of spirituous liquor. He got drunk every week of his life upon something or other ; gin, Dublin stout, spirits of wine—nothing came amiss to his palate so long as it was strong. He ate little else than rice, but that little was sometimes of an abominable description. He cooked everything for himself with his own hands, and perhaps that made Martha inclined to be scandalous ; but she once confided to me that he had curried a cat. I could believe anything of him ; and should not have been surprised (since there were opportunities, after storms at Hershell Point, for his indulging in that practice) to find that he was a ghoul, and ate human flesh. Whatever he ate, it must be owned it nourished him, for he was growing obese and unwieldy, and his little eyes sank deeper

every day in his fat cheeks. In his person, I am bound to say that Tannajee was scrupulously clean ; when not drinking or smoking, he was always washing, and spent hours at a time in the sea. Unfortunately, as I then thought, there were no sharks in Hershell Bay ; for the time was yet far off when, to use my uncle's words, I was to find "that Tannajee a perfect treasure."

I never thought him more utterly worthless than at the present moment, when, as he withdrew from the study, still muttering and grumbling, my uncle turned on me, and gave me the first scolding I ever heard from his lips.

"You are hasty and foolish, young Sir," said he. "Why do you thus anger that poor fellow?" (I thought of Tartuffe.) "Because his skin is brown, is that a reason for your hatred?"

"I hate him, uncle, because he is so disrespectful to you."

"Never you mind that, lad ; I can take care of myself, thank you ; and besides, he's not wanting in regard for me, although his manner of showing it may be peculiar."

"He is a drunkard," said I, rather sullenly, I am afraid, for his master's forbearance towards this scoundrel seemed to me nothing less than infatuation.

"Perhaps, Marmy," rejoined Uncle Theo gravely, "if

you were an exile in a foreign country among persons of another race, and even colour, you too would take to drink : many Englishmen do so in India."

" But he beats the servants."

" Many Englishmen do so in India," reiterated my uncle tranquilly : " we must know how to make allowances for others. At all events, Sangaree Tannajee was once my faithful and attached follower in very troublous times."

" Oh uncle," cried I, " pray, pray forgive me : I have behaved unkindly and ungratefully. Henceforward, Sam—I mean Sangaree—shall never be treated otherwise than well by me. I will ask his pardon, if you wish it, immediately."

" No, no ! don't do that, Marmy," said my uncle rather hastily ; " he would misunderstand you : we must not seem, you see, as if we were afraid of him." My dear guardian spoke in a hesitating and even painful manner, which I could not understand. But presently he added briskly : " Come, I forgive you, Marmy ; and do you, on your part, forget that I was angry with you. It has never happened before, my lad, has it ? "

" Oh Sir," said I, looking up into that bronzed and comely face, " I am an ungrateful boy. I have done nothing to deserve your regard, as this faithful fellow doubtless has, and yet I treat him——"

“Hush, hush, lad.”

Uncle Theo stooped down, for though I was a tall youth of my age, he was almost a foot taller, and kissed my forehead ; his blue eyes—so tender that they softened the bushy, grim moustache and weather-beaten features wholly—were moist with tears. “What is it brings you here, Marmy ?”

A few minutes ago, and I had resolved not to show him Mrs. Blunt’s communication, but now I felt that I could withhold nothing from him, any more than from the mother whose place he filled for me ; so I placed the letter in his hand. He read it very slowly, spelling it out half aloud to himself, for he was not familiar with manuscript. “She seems a wise and prudent lady, this friend of yours, Marmy,” said he, gravely. “Let us take counsel together over what she says. We agreed, I think, to abide by her decision as respects your literary talents ?”

“Yes, uncle,” said I as blithely as I could, but not without a wince.

“Well,” continued he, good-naturedly, “she evidently thinks more highly of them than she trusts herself to speak. If her decision had been dead against you, there would have been nothing for it but for you and me to part : that would have vexed us both, I think. I at least, who am growing old, would have felt very lonely

here, with the seas rolling between me and you, lad. Perhaps I should never have seen you again. That Indian life is not what it used to be ; the pagoda-tree has been too well shaken. It would have taken you half a lifetime to make your fortune ; and even if you had made it more quickly, how much might you have lost in exchange ? Look at me, Marmy—an old, ill-thought-of man, without a friend, because my days for friendship-making were passed out yonder.” He pointed across the eastern sea, that stretched beneath us, a plain of molten gold. “I am glad my boy is not to be sent to that school.” He stopped, and gazed upon me with a wistful sorrow. “I wish, Heaven knows,” he went on, “that I could say : ‘Follow your own way, Marmy ; and whether you succeed or not—whether you gain a shilling by your pen or not, there is enough and to spare for us both.’ But I cannot do this. It is necessary that you should do something for yourself, not for my sake, but for your own. I have sufficient to last us both so long as I am likely to live, but I have nothing to leave behind me except——” here Uncle Theo hesitated, evidently at a loss to express himself—“except a contingency. I myself may be very rich some day, Marmy. It is almost certain that you will be so. But in the mean time we are poor ; every year, every day, we are growing poorer, for the fact is we are

living on our principal. Of course this seems to you the height of imprudence; but it is too late to talk of that now. I calculated upon a certain expectation, which did not turn up so soon as I anticipated. Perhaps you are saying to yourself: ‘Why does my uncle thus speak in riddles?’ I cannot help that; I would tell you all if I could: there is no confidence, no secret, which is my own to tell, that I would not repose in you.”

“I am sure of that, Uncle Theo.”

“I hope so, lad. But, to convince you of it, see here.” He opened a little writing-desk, touched a secret spring, which set free a small drawer, and took from it an envelope, bearing this address upon it: *To my Nephew Marmaduke Drake. To be opened immediately after his uncle's death.* “I put this back again, Marmy, in the fullest conviction that you will never break that seal until the proper time arrives.”

Nothing could be more matter-of-fact and simple than my Uncle Theo’s manner. Although his own career, to that large class of persons who “believe nothing they do not read in a newspaper, or which does not come within their own trumpery experience,” might have seemed a melodrama, he himself (like him who had talked prose all his life without knowing it) was quite unconscious of the fact. Nothing imposed upon him in what he saw of

life. The fame of Mrs. Eleanor Blunt was no more to him than that of any tradesman whose goods were extensively advertised ; the Begum of Bundelbad was in his eyes merely a coarse, passionate woman, like Martha the cook. I am sure it did not seem strange to himself that he should be an ex-maharajah. In short, he was the most inartificial as well as straightforward of mankind. Thus, though in so singular a statement from any other man I should have suspected at least exaggeration and stage effect, I well knew that uncle Theo had told me the truth, and nothing but the truth (although, for reasons which were beyond his control, it was not the whole truth), concerning our affairs.

“To be still more explicit, Marmy,” continued my uncle, shutting up the desk again : “we two can live on here as we have hitherto done for the next five years, during which, let us hope, you will be able to establish your footing in literature. If so, you shall help to keep your old uncle ; and if not, well, we must sell Hershell Point, and live on the proceeds until better times !”

“You shall never sell ‘the Point’ on my account, dear Uncle Theo,” cried I warmly. “And oh, if I could but make you rich (not repay you what I owe you, for that is impossible) by my own exertions, how happy should I be ! It would be worth all the fame in the

world ! Five years in which to push my way ! I must be a very slow mole indeed, not to get through all difficulties in that time ! ”

Uncle Theo nodded and smiled, for he was very willing to share the confidence which I felt in my own powers. “I hope so, lad, indeed ; and I am sure it will be your misfortune, and not your fault, if you fail in the matter. We can but do our best, you know, whether we use pen or sabre. But, in the mean time, be civil to Tannajee, though I am afraid” (and here he smiled) “the true worth of that poor fellow will never be discovered by you until he is gone.”





CHAPTER V.

I A M E D I T E D .

DIRECTLY after my interview with my uncle, I was off for Sandiford, borne, as it were, on the wings of my glad news. How easily elated I was in those days ! How ridiculously prompt to believe that others were as interested in my affairs as I was myself ! How inordinately egotistic, how credulous, how vain ! But then, as dear Mrs. Blunt had observed, what lungs I had, what limbs !

The snow was falling thickly that December day, but I flew through it like a bird.

Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore
On winding lake or river wide,
That need no aid of sail or oar,
That heed no spite of wind and tide,
Nought cared this body for wind nor weather
When Youth and I lived in 't together;

and yet I would have given up all that vigour for ever so small a modicum of Fame, all that brave sack (of which I know the true value now) for a poor halfpennyworth of mouldy bread. I remember how disgusted I was that what I had to tell did not seem to fill good Mrs. Blunt with sympathetic transport. It did not even surprise her in the least.

“I knew you would persuade that dear maharajah to let you do as you liked, Marmy. If I had said that your manuscripts were only good for lighting the fires, you would have still got your way. However, I have done my duty. I am like the master of the ship who has been consulted by the captain as to its course, and has replied, that it is, in his opinion, a dangerous one—full of rocks and shoals; notwithstanding which the captain decides to hold on. I have made my remonstrance; if any mischance happens, I at least am not to blame.”

“Certainly not, Madam,” answered I; “but, like a good sailor who loves his ship” (“You rogue!” interrupted Mrs. Eleanor Blunt), “you will do your best to save her, nevertheless.”

The good-natured old lady was charmed with this reply. “Well, my dear,” said she, “I will do my best; but indeed literature is a trade in which a man must make his own way: an introduction from another is but of little

service. You may get your head in that way, but your shoulders must follow by your own exertions. It is no use my pushing you from behind. Now, you want me to get some of these deathless works of yours into print, I suppose?"—and here she touched the parcel of manuscripts a little contemptuously.

"Yes, Madam."

"That would be to do you a very ill service, Marmy," said she gravely. "At sixteen, everybody writes rubbish; Shakspeare himself doubtless did so at that epoch, and occasionally even a little later. I do not deny that this stuff is creditable to a lad like you, whose writing anything is like a dog walking on his hind-legs, as Johnson says; you do not do it well, but the wonder is that you do it at all. But then the wonder is only excited in those who are acquainted with your circumstances—your tender years. If the public should read these things in print as productions of a grown-up writer, they would only say: "This is a wretched plagiarist;" and they would be right. Now, don't be cast down, my dear; you will have much worse things said of you in after-years, if you take up with this calling, by persons who have not (as I have) your good in view, but only the indulgence of their own spite. Gad, Sir, with a skin like yours, you will be stung to death by midges."

I certainly felt very sore already, but not at all in the sense of irritation ; I was utterly depressed and humiliated. I felt that Mrs. Blunt was speaking the truth—that all those precious papers, the results of months of delightful toil, were indeed nothing but “wretched plagiarisms ;” the poems were echoes ; the prose, a patch-work, made up of scraps from my favourite authors.

“I will throw all these things behind the fire,” said I suddenly ; and I rose to do so.

“You will do nothing of the sort, my dear,” said the old lady quietly : “first, because so much fuel would certainly set fire to my little chimney ; and secondly, because what is valuable about your works will not remain after such a crucial test, as gold does in the furnace. I told you in my letter that it was not *all* rubbish. When I was your age, I had written twice as much, and what was equally worthless as a whole ; but, as in your case, there was the seed of good in them, the raw material that only required the requisite machinery—experience of life, power of expression, and other matters which cannot be supplied by intuition—to turn it (to use a woman’s image) into a fabric of pretty pattern, warranted to wash and wear. I laid by all these productions, not in obedience to the Horatian maxim, but simply because I could get nobody to publish them ; and in after-years, while fully agreeing

with the adverse editorial verdicts that had kept them in manuscript, I found in almost all of them the germ of something that blossomed agreeably enough in print. Indeed, I think the best things I have done are those which occurred to me in embryo, when I was very young. Some excellent compositions have doubtless been written off-hand by great authors in heat and at a sitting ; but, generally speaking—and especially with respect to prose writings—what is best is that which has long ripened in the brain, and been afterwards carefully pruned and trimmed. Thanks to the cant of our calling, this is not the popular view of good authorship ; but believe me, Marmy, it is the true one ; and whenever a professional writer tells you that he ‘trusts to inspiration,’ you may depend upon it that he takes a good deal of brandy and water.”

“But these manuscripts,” said I, impatient of Mrs. Blunt’s abstract remarks, and ignorant of their practical importance : “how am I to know what is wheat-ear and what is chaff?”

“In a year or two, you will be able to judge for yourself, Marmy ; but at present this is perhaps the one thing in which I can be of service to you. I will be your editor this afternoon ; only, instead of the usual ‘Declined with thanks,’ I will give you my reasons for rejection.”

"How kind you are!" cried I, with genuine gratitude, for, though as careless of advice in the general as any other young gentleman, I knew how to estimate it in this case. "How can I ever repay you, dear Mrs. Blunt?"

"What! for being your editor? Well, perhaps you may be my biographer some day, Marmy, when you will deal tenderly with my memory, for this day's sake."

I don't know what I answered; but the old lady nodded pleasantly in reply, and said: "God bless you, my dear."

Then we set to work at those manuscripts. I am afraid to say how many there were; but Mrs. Blunt read more than a dozen of them aloud. Her elocution was much better than mine, and yet they did not sound to me nearly so well as when I had read them to myself. It was often necessary for her to stop at this or that flowery passage (which had formerly seemed such a gem), with some remark, such as: "Too many creepers for your trellis-work, Marmy;" or, "Too fine, my dear, by half—all sunflowers and crown imperials." I could see for myself now how garish and tawdry the language was. The misplaced or extravagant epithets, the lavish synonyms, the borrowed images, were all pointed out with an unerring finger; and the bathos of many a splendid peroration was so laid bare, that I almost laughed at it myself. Nor

did she confine herself to verbal criticism, but, with a nicety which showed what pains she had taken with my poor productions, explained how the interest of one narrative was weakened by division, or exhibited the inconsistencies of character in the *dramatis personæ* of another. She used the scalpel like a skilful surgeon, fearlessly, but not mercilessly ; she cut deep, but without inflicting unnecessary pain. And, on the other hand, with what pleasure she halted whenever in that Great Sahara she found palms and water, to say : “ Well done ! ” or, “ That’s really good, Marmy.”

Of course, in my case there was a little favouritism ; but in the matter of generous yet critical appreciation, I have never known anyone (save dear Leigh Hunt, perhaps) to equal Mrs. Eleanor Blunt ! She was a very Jack Horner for picking out literary plums. It is true these were very scarce in my pudding : but the praise, when it did come, was all the more precious ; the balm in those few words healed all the gaping wounds which had been before inflicted on my self-love, and left me all the better for the blood-letting ; or I should rather say I felt in my new literary position like one who has been just shampooed in a Turkish bath—much less corporeally, but with what was left of me in the highest possible condition. Before the operation, I had no idea that there

had been so much superfluity to come away ; but now I trod upon air. In only one respect was I cast down ; my poetry had met with considerably less favour in my mentor's eyes than my prose. It was not without some grace and elegance of expression, she allowed, but "Gad, Sir, it's very thin." She was strongly against my cultivating this talent. "If you were a rich man, Marmy, it would be different; you might give half your days to polish—*ad unguem*, &c., you know" (but I didn't know); "as it is, you cannot afford the time. The chances are ten thousand to one, and more, against your getting your living by such work. The British public can only afford to keep one or two poets at most ; the rest find the greatest difficulty in keeping themselves. It is the prose that pays, and, above all, that branch of it to which you seem to have some calling. Some day, when you and I are dead, Marmy, and all the world runs and reads, and Yankee publishers give up thieving, the most popular British novelist will be the richest man in England. In the meantime, half a loaf, or less, is better than no bread, and we pick up our crumbs. But the writer of fiction needs, above all others, to have experience of life. You cannot spin stories out of your inside, as a spider spins his web ; you must have material. You must study men and women, Marmy, as the scholar his books. The

volume of Nature is open to you at Hershell Point, but there are not enough of those flesh-and-blood illustrations which you require to have before your eyes. When you have painted your uncle (whose outlines are recognisable enough in your productions already), and that black gentleman who waits upon him, and little Mr. Glendell, your doctor (a very excellent fellow, by-the-bye), and me, you will almost have come to the end of your present tether. You must not stop at ‘the Point,’ Marmy, if you mean to take up the trade of letters.”

“I could never leave my uncle,” said I firmly.

“Then you must take him away with you,” replied Mrs. Blunt. “But you need not think of that for some time to come. For the present, read whatever you can lay hands on, but especially good sterling English writers like this man” (she put into my hands the *Rural Rides* of William Cobbett): “the descriptions in that book excel all your modern word-paintings for life-likeness, as much as objects in a stereoscope excel those in a picture. Read, and, above all things, observe; and never trust to your memory when there is an opportunity to use a notebook.—There, Marmy; my preaching is over. The words of the wisdom of Mrs. Eleanor Blunt are ended.”

“They will not soon be forgotten, dear Madam,” said I dutifully.

"I hope not, my dear ; and I will now add, for your encouragement—since it is finally settled that you are to try to open that oyster 'the world' with a steel pen—that it is my belief that you will succeed in doing so. If the ex-maharajah can, as he says, support you for five years, you ought certainly by that time to be able to run alone. For even if one fails as an author," squeaked the dear old lady, her black eyes dancing with roguish glee, "and the worst comes to the very worst, one can always be a critic, you know, Marmy."

I do not think there was any happier creature on the earth than I as I ran home that evening, after a *tête-à-tête* dinner with my hostess. The snow had ceased, leaving the whole earth covered with a mantle, on which the moonbeams sparkled as on frosted silver. The sky showed a thousand stars. The winter sea sent its deep monotone for miles inland through the clear still air. I seemed to drink in the beauty of earth and air, and sky and sea, as I had never done before. It was a keen and bitter frost, but my veins were aglow with a joy that no cold could chill. I have said that there was no light-house at that time at Hershell ; but to one coming from Sandiford, the lamp in our sitting-room could always be seen at night from a great distance. I wondered that I did not see it there now ; but concluding that my uncle

had retired earlier than usual, its absence gave me no anxiety. When I reached home, however, and Martha answered the bell, I saw by her face at once that something was amiss.

"What is the matter?" asked I with anxiety. "My uncle is not in the sitting-room."

"No, Sir, nor in the house neither," answered the cook. "He's gone away, and Heaven knows where, all along **of** that Sugary Tannajee; drat him!"





CHAPTER VI.

THE HINDU BECOMES MY PATIENT.

MY uncle's absence was unprecedented. Ever since I had known him, he had never left "the Point," even for a single day; but the sudden departure (for such I learned it had been) of Sangaree Tannajee was even more extraordinary still. He had no friend in the world except his master: his colour, his strange English, and—if I might so speak of the absent—his extravagantly hideous appearance, made him an object of ridicule to all except our little household. Our roof was the only secure haven for him, and yet he had left it of his own free-will, and apparently for good and all. At least—as Martha informed me—he had quitted the house while my uncle and I were engaged in that conversation concerning my future which has been al-

ready described, with a large white bundle, that was his substitute for portmanteau, hat-box, &c., and which doubtless contained all his worldly goods, since they were missing. His absence was not remarked until I had myself left for Sandiford, when my uncle had rung his bell for him in vain. "Then such a fuss as there was, Mr. Marmaduke. I never saw master so put about before," said Martha, describing these occurrences with great unction. "It was : 'Cook, run here,' and 'Nancy, run there'—all after that liver-coloured Tannajee. Your uncle ran down to the beach as lissome as yourself, as though he expected to find his man had toppled hisself over the cliff. But, as I said to Nancy, he was a deal more likely, was Sugary, to kill somebody else than his precious self ; and master heard me, and oh, Mr. Marmaduke, if he didn't swear worse than the parrot ! I never heard the likes; for Tannajee, with all the will in the world to be wicked, could never swear like a Christian man. 'Well,' says I, 'these are pretty words ; and if I leave your service to-morrow, Sir, I hope that 'ere fellow has gone for good, as the saying is (though for good he never can be) ; for a sweet riddance it will be for them as he's left behind.'—'I beg your pardon, Martha, for swearing,' says your uncle, as gentle as could be ; 'but you don't know what you are talking about.' And he really

did look so grieved, that I half-wished the poor coloured creature back again, if that could be any comfort to him, as a black dose is said to be to them as is bilious, which I never was myself, and consequently don't hold by it. Well, we searched and searched, but he was nowhere to be found ; and presently the baker came, and said he had met my gentleman with a bundle on his shoulder, making straight for Daisyport. At which news your uncle snatched up his hat, and without even putting his greatcoat on, started off like a March hare. And that's just all I knows about it, Mr. Marmaduke."

This news distressed me exceedingly ; not, of course, that I regretted the Hindu's defection one whit more than did his fellow-servants, upon its own account, but for the vexation it had evidently caused his master ; while I could not divest myself of the idea that it was my own behaviour towards the missing man that had somehow brought about the catastrophe. When I called to mind the expression of truculent animosity which Tannajee's face had worn that morning, when I stirred his fat carcass with my foot, and his vehemence of speech and gesture when my uncle strode in between us, I could not but acknowledge that it must be me who was to blame ; and for how much ? What was the extent of the mischief to my kind protector ? What stake could my uncle have in

this man? What interest in keeping him in his service, that he should thus start off in cold and darkness to pursue him? I did not for a moment believe that mere attachment to Tannajee had caused this solicitude for his safety. It is true that master and man were on those terms of familiarity that are sometimes seen between an employer and his faithful dependant; but this did not seem to me to be founded on the usual basis of tried and ancient service. I had penetration enough to see through the Hindu's show of respect to my uncle in public, and to contrast it with his languid insolence when I had occasionally, as on that very morning, come upon them when alone. My presence had hitherto, as it seemed to me, been the signal for both to return to something like their respective positions, to act the parts of master and servant, which were laid aside when there was no spectator; and yet, I repeat, it did not strike me that Uncle Theo had much genuine regard for Tannajee, and far less that the latter had a due respect for his employer. The bond of union, evidently so strong between them, was not that of mutual esteem or affection. What, then, in the name of wonder, could it be? What material interest could they possibly have in common? My uncle had spoken of our not discovering the true value of the Asiatic until his death—a common expres-

sion enough, it is true, to apply to a well-tried and valuable domestic, but which was, in this man's case, a most inappropriate phrase. Sangaree Tannajee was an ill-tempered idle fellow, quarrelsome in his cups, and very often in them, one who gave more trouble to our little household than any other member of it, and whose situation in it grew more and more of a sinecure daily. Was it possible, then, that my uncle literally meant that his death would be of pecuniary advantage to us? What had this wretched Hindu to leave behind him, except his turban and a few yards of spotless linen? Besides, it could not be the loss of him to which my guardian had thus alluded, for had he not once observed to me: "I would not lose Sangaree Tannajee for ten thousand pounds?"

Sorely perplexed by these reflections, I sat up in our little drawing-room, vainly endeavouring to give my attention to anything else. I tried to write, but found my fingers involuntarily forming the mysterious Asiatic's name; I took up book after book, and the printed letters formed themselves into the same combination again and again; I went to the window, in hopes to see my uncle and his man—for without the latter I felt confident the former would not return—descending the zigzag; but I saw nothing but "the flying cloud, the

frosty night." It had grown darker since my arrival, and presently the dusk was such that, in order to pierce through it with my eyes at all, I was obliged to extinguish the lamp. The wind, too, had risen, and howled dismally about our little house. Then I feared for my uncle's health, who although a strong man in other respects, had been made by the Indian climate peculiarly susceptible to cold. We had fires at Hershell Point a month before other folks in the neighbourhood began them, on the ex-maharajah's account, at least as much as by reason of our more exposed position. He scarcely ever ventured out even in the autumn evenings, yet now he had departed without a greatcoat across the snowy downs to Daisyport. And once more I bitterly reproached myself for having been the unwitting cause of such a dangerous imprudence.

I went down to the kitchen, and enjoined on Martha to have something warm and savoury in readiness, and boiling water for a hot bath if necessary; and I kept up the fire in my uncle's bed-room—the only luxury, by-the-by, except his cheroots, in which he ever indulged—with my own hands.

At last, about one in the morning, I discerned two figures slowly wending their way down the zigzag. It was in the highest degree improbable that they should be

any others than those for whom I waited ; yet even as they drew near I could scarcely recognise them. The brisk elastic tread of my dear uncle was exchanged for the stumbling gait of an overtired and exhausted man ; the slouching amble which generally characterised Tannajee, who, notwithstanding his huge proportions, was a speedy walker after his own fashion, had altogether disappeared. He moved with slow and hesitating steps, like one who walks in his sleep : and short as the distance was during which I observed them, I saw him stop suddenly half-a-dozen times, and receive his master's assistance before he could proceed. I ran out to meet them, and my uncle smiled and nodded, but it really seemed that he had no strength to speak.

“Get Tannajee to bed,” he murmured : “the doctor at once.”

Certainly the Hindu looked wretchedly ill. As Martha used (not without some satisfaction) to express it, he always enjoyed bad health ; his digestion I knew was dreadfully impaired, and I attributed it to drink ; but I had never seen him look half so bad as on the present occasion. In the first place, he rolled from side to side like a loose cask on shipboard, and had no command whatever over his limbs. His eyes, which had never, within my recollection, failed to express disfavour at my

approach, had now no more speculation in them than those of a corpse ; and in spite of the bitter cold, he was in a profuse perspiration.

It was absolutely necessary for me to remain to assist him up the steps before our door ; a task to which his companion, unaided, seemed wholly unequal ; but no sooner had we got him withinside, than my uncle reiterated : “The doctor at once, Marmy ;” and off I flew into the village. I was back again in ten minutes.—Mr. Glendell, the kindly *Æsculapius* of the place, having promised to follow me as soon as he could—when a strange sight indeed was presented to me. My uncle, his wet clothes still unchanged—for snow had fallen during the last few hours upon the downland—was walking Tannajee about from room to room, in spite of the Hindu’s entreaties to be suffered to lie down and sleep. The garments of the latter had been exchanged for warm and dry ones, and the solicitude for his welfare expressed in his master’s eyes was like that of some devoted brother. It was with difficulty, and only under promise of keeping the unhappy Tannajee in active exercise, that I could persuade my uncle to take measures for his own safety. I did not stop to enquire why such a task was imposed upon me, but hustled my remonstrating charge from parlour to kitchen with a “No, you don’t,”

and the application of a pin's point, whenever he attempted to take a chair. "Don't let him stand still, Marmy," was my uncle's earnest direction to me, "or permit him to sit down for a single instant ; his very life depends upon it, and," added he in a solemn whisper, "your uncle's honour."

Of course I was careful to obey such instructions, however inexplicable they might appear ; but I pitied poor helpless Sambo from my heart, notwithstanding that ever and anon his flabby features were overspread with a baleful glance at his tormentor, to whom he evidently gave no credit for any good intentions towards him.

It was clear he was dog-tired and, but for me, would have fallen asleep as he moved ; but besides that, he seemed to be in that peculiar stage of intoxication which is called "sodden!" his senses appeared to be so steeped in liquor that there was no rousing them ; and I could not but wonder that he was not permitted to obey the dictates of nature, and sleep away the effects of so gross a debauch.

When the doctor came, however, and had exchanged a few words in private with my uncle, he quite approved of the very singular treatment to which the Hindu had been subjected, with the addition that cold water should be constantly dashed on his head, and directed that it

should for the present be continued. "The stomach-pump is what he *wants*," said Mr. Glendell thoughtfully.

"The very thing," cried Uncle Theo with excitement; "of course he wants the stomach-pump."

"Yes; but unfortunately my little surgery does not boast of such an article," returned the doctor; "and I am afraid you, Mr. Braydon, are not like Mr. Alfred Jingle, who, you remember (*in Pickwick*) always carried that useful article in his portmanteau."

My uncle sighed profoundly. "No, indeed," said he. The other's jocose allusion seemed to grate upon his feelings, moved as they were so powerfully by the spectacle before them.

"Don't be cast down, my good Sir," said Mr. Glendell briskly; "although your anxiety about our coloured friend here, I am sure, does you infinite credit." (Sambo's character as a domestic servant was not unknown to the speaker, who had also attended him professionally before.) "It is my opinion that he has already tided over the worst of it. It is indeed entirely to your exertions that he owes his life; five minutes sleep upon the downs yonder would have been his death-doom; but I do think you have pulled him through. If he had not been a confirmed opium-eater, such a dose would have killed him on the spot; but being so used to it—— There; he's

opened his eyes quite wide, you see. I should have said ‘sulphate of zinc and powdered ipecacuanha,’ if I had seen him earlier; but it is too late for that sort of treatment now; and indeed he is too exhausted. He had a strong constitution originally, that fellow, but he has played the deuce with it. Opium and drink have undermined him, and I should fancy — at one time of his life at least—to judge by the look of him, overfeeding.”

“No ; he has always been very temperate as to food,” replied my uncle.

“Ah, well, then he’s been particularly unfortunate in what he did eat,” observed the surgeon drily, “for he’s a victim to dyspepsia. Perhaps that accounts for his queer temper.—Were you telling me that he actually took that laudanum, simply because you told him to come back with you from Daisyport ?”

“He did indeed. I came up with him just before he reached the town, and insisted upon his return—upon his not leaving my house in that surreptitious and unpleasant manner. Then he flew into an outrageous passion, and declared all I wanted was his death.”

“The ungrateful nigger ! ” ejaculated the doctor.

“Well, I did not condescend to remonstrate with him ; but seizing him firmly by the wrist, I compelled him to

accompany me. He got very tired coming over the down, and presently we sat down to rest. Then he began to narrate his troubles ; how badly he was treated at Hershell Point" (the doctor smiled contemptuously), "and especially what indignities he had to put up with."

Here I felt my cheeks burn, for I knew that my uncle was speaking as much for my own benefit as that of his other hearer.

"Do you feel better, Tannajee?" enquired I tenderly, as I administered another glass of water to his forehead, like a clergyman who baptises a delicate babe.

He muttered something in the Hindustanee language in reply, which, being translated, means "child of the devil."

It was his favourite term for me when he was in his cups.

"I don't think I have much to reproach myself with as Tannajee's master," continued Uncle Theo gravely ; "and I told him so pretty plainly. Some high words passed between us. He jumped up and attempted to run away from me, and I pursued and collared him—perhaps a little roughly. Then once more crying out that all I wanted was his death, and actuated by one of those childish fits of passion peculiar to his race, he pro-

duced a phial of laudanum from his pocket, and drank it to the dregs before I could stop his hand. Imagine my horror, Glendell, and the difficulties of my position ! I am a powerful man ; but to convoy, or rather to convey a person of his bulk for many miles, contrary to such will as was left in him, and against wind and snow, is no slight task. However, if I have indeed saved the poor fellow's life, I do not begrudge my labour."

" You have behaved nobly, Mr. Braydon, and I think have reaped your reward," said the surgeon ; " although you will be lucky if you do not suffer in your own health from such exertions.—See ; our patient is recovering his beautiful native colour under Mr. Marmaduke's hands ; and after some egg and milk, I think he may be suffered to have his sleep out."

" He shall be put in my bed," said my uncle ; " and Marmy and I will keep watch over him by turns."

" I hope Mr. Tannajee will be grateful for your kind attentions," remarked the doctor severely ; " though he does not seem to have a very genial expression at present. But it is a good sign when a gentleman in his position begins to recover his usual looks. If he asks for anything to drink, which he is pretty sure to do, give him magnesia and water."

With that the surgeon took his leave ; and my uncle

and I led the already half-slumbering Hindu to his welcome pillow.

"I shall watch him for an hour or two, Marmy ; and do you go to bed, my lad, for you must be sadly tired. If all seems to be going on well, I shall take my snooze on the sofa."

In vain I endeavoured to combat this resolution.

"I have begun with this, Marmy," said my uncle earnestly, "and I will go through with it. Tired as I am, I should not sleep a wink while there was still cause for anxiety. I thank God that it has been in my power to do what I have done for this man. Yes ; I am truly grateful for having been strengthened to do my duty. The devil has been sorely tempting me this night, Marmy, but he has not overcome me. I feel as though I had even taken a few steps towards heaven." With a grave yet well-pleased look my Uncle Theo took both my hands in his, and kissed my cheek. "Good-night, dear lad, and remember me in your prayers."

Astonished as I was by my uncle's manner as much as by his words, I felt that it was no time to ask for explanations, but retired to my bed at once. I was awakened in about an hour's time by the sound of high words in my uncle's room. The patient and the watcher were quarrelling. They spoke as usual in the Hindustanee tongue,

but I caught one word repeated by my uncle with extreme vehemence, with sufficient accuracy to remember it. The application of the term seemed instantly to silence Sangaree Tannajee, and I laid it carefully up in my mind for future use, should occasion arise for it on my own account.





CHAPTER VII.

MRS. BLUNT AND I AND SOMEBODY.

THE event recorded in the last chapter was not without its effect even upon my youthful and elastic mind ; it convinced me that, in some way or other, the fortunes of my dear uncle and myself were knit up with one whom I could not but consider a most unworthy object ; and I felt degraded by the connection between us and him. The shadow of the mystery of our little household cast a gloom over me, that all Uncle Theo's kindness could not dispel. Far from reproaching me with the conduct which had, without doubt, been the immediate cause of Tannajee's flight, he seemed to redouble his attempts to make Hershell Point a happy home for me ; but this was only heaping coals of fire on my head. He was ill ; his exertions upon that inclement night had told upon a constitution unaccustomed to our

English winters : although he looked as strong and as noble as ever, he had a cough, which never left him night or day ; and when he coughed, I shuddered. Unreasoning, impulsive, full of presentiments for evil or for good, I already saw my benefactor slain by the consequences of my own foolish passion. Tannajee was as well as ever, grumbling whenever called upon to attend to his sick master ; silent, but scowling, as respected myself, though I was as civil to him as though he were my brother. It was the most unhappy time I had experienced ; yet a gleam of sunshine suddenly struck in upon me, which warmed me to the core. It may seem nothing to many of my readers, but a few will understand it. It caused me sensations, compared with which those of mere material success in life are feeble, and even the dawnings of first love.

'One morning, there arrived by the post no less than a dozen newspapers, all directed to Marmaduke Drake, Esq. They were duplicate sheets of the *Sandiford Mercury*, a periodical the circumstances of which did not enable it to offer pecuniary reward to its contributors, but which remunerated them for their services, besides increasing its own modest circulation, by sending them twelve copies of their works in type. My *Lines to —* had actually been published ; I was in print at last.

How shall I describe to that now comparatively small portion of the public that does not write for glory or for greed, what emotions were mine, what being in print means to the sucking author ! What type can typify type itself? which is his *summum bonum*. I may say of it what a lover of music said to his pianoforte :

No fairy casket full of bliss outvalues thee ;
Love only wakened with a kiss more sweet may be.

But I knew nothing about love at present, and it seemed to me that I had reached the very goal of happiness.

I gave a copy of the *Mercury* to Martha ; one to the maid-of-all-work, Nancy ; and even one to Sangaree Tannajee, although he could not read a line of English, and not unnaturally set down my generosity as only another instance to be added to the long category of insults he imagined himself to have received at my hands. He managed to find out what was the particular attraction to me in the paper in question, and lit a cheroot in my presence with my deathless lines. As to my uncle, I gave him three copies ; thus only retaining half-a-dozen duplicates for my own private delectation. The provincial printer had made about as many mistakes as there were lines in the poem, and though I corrected them carefully in each case, my heart bled to think what a false impression must be made on those hundreds of readers

who saw, for instance, “posture” in the place of “pasture,” and “silver forks” in that of “silver frost.” It is not my intention to inflict upon the public those early (or later) productions, under which my kind-hearted editress suffered so patiently, but still I feel I owe it to my genius to set it right with the world in this particular case, wherein it has been so sadly misrepresented. The *Lines to ——*, too, were in fact addressed to Mrs. Eleanor Blunt, and have therefore some general interest—or rather they did have at that time, for the great reputation of that charming writer has faded with each revolving year, and the present generation of readers worships other literary gods. At all events, the poem will give a fair idea of my quality as a verse-writer at the tender age of sixteen or seventeen at most, and may so far serve to illustrate this little life-story. Looking back at it through these many, many years, it really seems to me to have some touches of grace about it; and certes I could write no such sonnet now, were it to save my life.

LINES TO ——, ON NEW-YEAR'S DAY.

Dear Lady, and kind friend, my love to thee
(But tell not thou the lady of my love *);
Through all this New-Year's day be blue above,
And silver frost † on earth ; from tree to tree

* I need scarcely say that this was only a gallant conceit.

† Imagine my feelings at “silver forks” in place of this!

The wreathed diamonds we poets see,
And all the country round which thou hast made
Thine own, and ours—heath, pasturemead, and glade—
As thy glad heart would have it, so may't be !
A happy year ; a new year rich in good
(For so, I know, to thee the happiest year) ;
Amid the poor, less frowns and better cheer ;
And more like thee, to teach as teachers should,
Who, coming across my heart this Christmas-time
Of love and graciousness, could scarce escape a rhyme.

I must honestly confess that I do not think my uncle understood one word of all this, any more than Martha, or Nancy, or Tannajee : and that even if I had left uncorrected those infamous misprints, he would hardly have discovered their inappropriateness. But he was pleased to see me so pleased, and put his three copies of the *Sandiford Mercury* religiously away in his desk, as a sacred though mysterious treasure. Being informed, however, that the poem referred to Mrs. Eleanor Blunt, he quite agreed with me that I should start at once to lay that offering at her feet in person ; and for Seaview Cottage I accordingly set forth with a beating heart. I am sure no lover who bears a present to his mistress ever pictured to himself her pleasure at receiving it, with brighter tints than those with which I painted my kind friend's satisfaction at what I had produced for her, from the depth of my heart and by the sweat of my brain. Nor was I disap-

pointed with its reception. Mrs. Eleanor Blunt was charmed (or she had a very charming way of persuading me so) with my little act of homage.

Even great authors, and especially anthoresses, are mortal ; and, perhaps touched with my simple flattery, she let her personal feelings tinge her judgment ; but unquestionably she henceforth expressed a higher opinion of my literary promise. She did not now think it so much too soon to aid me to venture into print, since I had already got there without her help—although it must be confessed that the *Sandiford Mercury* was not a journal of European reputation ; and we took counsel together as to how the thing should be done.

For my own part, notwithstanding this recent gleam of success, I was rather tired of being rejected by editors, who had shown themselves worse than even the unjust judge in the Scripture, who was overcome by importunity ; and Mrs. Blunt, on her side, was not perhaps desirous to ask any personal favour of them on my account. “I know So-and-so, and So-and-so,” said she, naming the conductors of some very first-class magazines indeed, to which even my ambition had not aspired ; “but I know so well what their cut-and-dried replies would be : ‘Your young friend must fill his basket first ;’ and so on. Besides, although it does no hurt to an old hand like me,

magazine-writing spoils the style. I tell you what you shall do, my dear,—what, at all events, will prove that you have patience, a quality indispensable to one of your proposed calling—you shall write a three-volume novel."

This idea transported me ; I could have sat down and begun at once.

"This will take you a year at least," mused she (my countenance fell) ; "and then, at eighteen, you will have entirely to rewrite it." (It might have almost been written in my face, it became so blank.) "Then with a few hints from me, and some corrections, you will most likely be able to get some publisher to bring it out at his own risk, or even pay you something for it ; but money will be a very secondary consideration ; the point is to place yourself before the public. If the book has any worth at all, you will then have a little reputation to trade upon, and the magazines will be glad enough to get you."

I have no doubt I still looked the reverse of enraptured with this tardy scheme.

"Such is my advice, my dear," continued the old lady firmly ; "and it should not be unpalatable to one who really believes that he has got something in him. If you find yourself able to make an income, however small, by literature by the time you are nineteen, you ought to be more than satisfied. As it is, I am stretching a point to please

you, for readers prefer seasoned brains ; and any less prejudiced mentor would, I am certain, postpone your public appearance at least until you are one-and-twenty. There is no case in which the line ‘Raw-Haste, half-sister to Delay,’ more exactly applies than to the literary aspirant. Indeed, were your own circumstances less exceptional than they are, you would have found me much more unrelenting.”

“I dare say you advise me for the best,” murmured I, endeavouring to look grateful.

“I am sure of it, my dear,” said the old lady quietly. “But unfortunately, in these affairs, one can give nothing *but* advice. You must help yourself, if you wish Heaven to help you. Young people less sensible than you, but bitten by the same mad dog, have often come to me for ideas, for plots, for literary material of all sorts. Now, that’s absurd : every author is bound to find (or steal) his own materials ; not to mention that when I happen to get possession of an idea, I do assure you I keep it for myself.”

“I *have* got a plot,” said I, raising my head for the first time.

“Of course you have, my dear ; half-a-dozen of them ; and mind you take great pains to select the best. When you have written twenty chapters—that is, in about six

months hence—you may come here (if I am alive), and read them to me.—You see,” added she, smiling, “what I am content to suffer for your sake.”

“ You are very good to me, dear Mrs. Blunt ; and I am a sad thankless fellow,” said I earnestly. “ However, I will obey your bidding to the letter.”

“ There’s a good boy.—Now, let us ‘sink the shop.’ Tell me all that’s going on at Hershell.”

“ Well, Madam, my uncle (of whom, if I had been less egotistical, I should have spoken before) is far from being in his usual health.”

“ What ! the maharajah ill ? I should not have thought that possible ! He looks to me like one who would maintain all his energies till about ninety-five, and then suddenly die in his bed.—How did he manage to get out of health ? ”

Then little by little, and very unwillingly, I found myself telling Mrs. Blunt, who was a perfect sleuth-hound after a mystery, and delighted in it above everything, all I knew about Sangaree Tannajee and my uncle, but under the strictest seal of secrecy. It had not been actually enjoined upon me to be silent on the matter, and I really felt it a great relief to unbosom myself to such a sympathising friend. She listened with the utmost interest, and when I concluded with, “ All that I feel cer-

tain about in the matter is, that whatever hold this wretched Hindu has upon his master, it does not arise from anything of which my uncle need be ashamed," she only nodded assent, and sat staring at the fire.

"I am too old to be astonished at anything," said Mrs. Blunt presently ; "but certainly what you tell me is very remarkable. Now, if my friend, Mr. Edgar Allan Poe, were here (one of the most sagacious men about other people's affairs, and *the* greatest fool about his own, I know), he would get at the bottom of this mystery before he slept to-night. Let us see ; what does your uncle say about this fellow ? 'I myself may be very rich some day, but it is almost certain you (his nephew) will be so.' Then : 'I wouldn't lose him for so many thousand pounds ;' and again : 'We shall never find out his worth until he is gone ;' and all the time this 'Perfect Treasure of a servant,' as he also calls him, is an ill-tempered and idle drunkard, and not even devoted to the master who thus eulogises him. Putting aside the idea of this fellow's having any hold upon your uncle arising from his master's misbehaviour (which I agree with you that we may safely do), still, imprudence often proves quite as strong a snare as vice, or even crime. In some way or other, Sangaree Tannajee has so secure a footing in your household, that no ill conduct can make him lose it. Your uncle evi-

dently estimates him very highly in one sense—doubtless a material one—and yet without entertaining for him a particle of esteem. Now, the question is: How are we to reconcile this inconsistency? How are we to ——”

“ Madam,” interrupted I hastily, “ we are both wrong ; but I am most to blame. If my uncle had intended me to find out the mysterious connexion between Tannajee and our own fortunes, he would have revealed it to me himself ; on the contrary, he has enjoined me not to open the sealed packet in his desk which contains the solution of this affair until after his death. Is not that equivalent to forbidding me to enquire into the matter at all ? ”

“ Frankly, I think not,” said Mrs. Blunt. “ It appears to me that your uncle is under some solemn promise—and indeed any promise would be solemn to a man of his chivalrous nature, to keep silence upon the affair himself ; but the very fact of his not having laid a similar injunction upon you, proves that he wishes you to use your freedom. He did not chide you, it seems, for making your own observations upon the Hindu’s misconduct, and his master’s singular mildness towards him. He would have said, had he wished you to be gagged and bound like himself: ‘ For the future, whatever you may observe in my servant’s behaviour or in mine, you need take no notice.’ Do you see what I mean ? ”

"Yes," said I ; "and I should like to believe it. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to discover this secret, and thereby possibly set free my uncle from the trammels in which he is certainly involved. But my own idea is, that the mystery, whatever it may be, is so obscure, so altogether sunk in the past, that my uncle, himself a simple and incurious man, believes it to be wholly incapable of solution, except by the key that lies within that packet, and which he is justly convinced I would as soon cut off my hand as make use of before the time appointed. He acts with the same consciousness of safety as a man who lets his private desk lie about the house, since it is fastened by one of those letter-padlocks, the 'open sesame' of which it would take a life-time to discover by trial. At the same time, since the necessary combination might just, within the range of possibility, be hit upon by accident, he would not wish the children of the house to be trying their luck with it all day."

"He would tell them not to do so then," persisted the old lady.

"At all events, my dear Mrs. Blunt," said I gravely, "I must beg of you ——"

Here I was interrupted by the entrance of a servant announcing a name which I did not catch, and ushering

in a young lady, who threw herself into the arms of my hostess with affectionate warmth.

“ You dear little darling,” cried the latter ; “ how glad I am to see you back again ! And only to think of your thus flashing in upon me all of a sudden like a sunrise at sea ! How dared you do it ?—And you—yes, you”—and here the scornful finger of Mrs. Eleanor Blunt caused me to blush from head to heel—“ how dare you, Sir, to come from Hershell Point with what you call your news, and never to say a word about my Rosa’s return to England ? ”





CHAPTER VIII.

MISS GLENDELL.

“**M**Y ROSA,” as my literary godmother called this unexpected stranger, was a girl of about my own age, dark as an Andalusian but tall, and so frank-faced, that you could not mistake her for aught but Saxon. Her cheeks, aglow with brisk walking through the frosty air, grew yet more crimson as her attention was thus drawn perforce to me by Mrs. Blunt’s appeal. I had never seen her before, but I could make a very good guess as to who she was.

“I did not know this young lady was expected so soon at home,” said I, “far less that she had arrived. What a pleasant surprise you must have given to your father, Miss Glendell; he has so often spoken about you to my uncle and myself, who are very warm friends of

his, you must know ; ” and I stepped forward and held out my hand with my best air.

She took it without the least embarrassment. “ I have often heard,” said she, “ from Mrs. Blunt here, as well as from dear papa, of Mr. Marmaduke Drake, and his uncle, the ex-maharajah ; ” and a sunny smile lit up her glorious Spanish face. Her tones were soft and low, but very distinct. She had the easy grace of a woman of the world of twice her age. For the first time in my life, I felt abashed, confused, and subjugated : she was mistress of herself and me.

“ Well, it seems you don’t want an introduction to each other, young people,” observed Mrs. Blunt, regarding us with a pleasant twinkle of her eyes. “ You must be good friends, you two ; you may be of great mutual service to each other ; for this young gentleman, Rosa, is in a position to give you lectures on the British Classics, which, I dare say, you have shamefully neglected while in Frogland ; and this young lady, Marmy, can teach you French, besides every modern accomplishment that was ever heard of. So you are ‘finished’ now, my dear Rosa, are you ? A perfect professor of languages and the fine arts, including calisthenics and the use of the globes, eh ? ”

“ Yes, my dear Madam ; or, at all events, thank good-

ness, I have done with Paris, and have come home, to be with dear papa a year. He has promised himself that treat, as he calls it, before I go out"—here the young girl hesitated, then added, with particular distinctness, as though ashamed of a weakness she had overcome—"before I go out as a governess, you know."

I felt myself growing scarlet: the idea of this lovely creature being compelled, at so early an age, to work for her own living, made me quite indignant.

"A year hence will be about the time that you too, Marmy, will be making your first appearance on the stage of life," observed Mrs. Blunt. "I shall regard your *débuts* with interest, for you have both, in some sort, been my pupils; although you, Rosa, have been so long a truant, that you must have forgotten my instructions years ago."

"I have not at least forgotten your many kindnesses, dear Madam," replied the young girl affectionately. "You have no idea, by-the-bye, how useful your letters of introduction have been to me. Madame Boncieux was quite proud of having a pupil in whom so many eminent persons professed themselves interested; and then how good you have been to correspond with me so often, you who have so many calls upon your pen. It is impossible for one to imagine, without having been

an exile from home, as I have been, how welcome is the handwriting of a friend ! ” The speaker’s eyes filled with honest tears. Her manner, which had a certain graceful demonstrativeness about it scarcely English, was so inexpessibly touching that I could have wept myself.

“ My poor Rosa ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Blunt with tenderness, “ it seems to me your fate has been a hard one.”

“ Not at all, dear Madam,” replied she cheerfully ; “ for I assure you I have been almost always treated with consideration. My aunt, who sent for me to live with her when my poor mother died, was very kind ; and when God took her, it was my own wish to go to Madame Boncieux. My dear father would have sent for me home at once ; but how could I learn in Hershell village to get my own living ? to cease to be a drag upon his efforts ? For, he is very poor, you know, and is no longer young. If he had had his will, his love would have rendered me useless ; he and you would have downright spoiled me ; but now, as you say, I have learned to teach everything to everybody ; ” and for the first time she laughed .so merrily as well as musically that it was clear her experience of life, however severe a burden, had not destroyed the elasticity of youth.

“ And, with all your fine Parisian ways,” said the old lady, who was obviously as proud of her Rosa as though

she had been really her mother, “you have not forgotten how to walk, it seems. How nice it is of you to have trudged all this way to see me so early.”

“Well, I think it would have been good of me if I had left papa,” returned the other smiling; “but the fact is, he had to go over to Daisyport, to see a patient;” and I thought I should just have time to run down and have a kiss of you, and back again, before he returned home.— But I really must bid you good-bye now, for the present; for he is like a child with a new toy, and cannot bear me to be out of his sight.”

“If you must go, dear Rosa, you must; but since you and Marmy live at the same out-of-the-way, end-of-the-world place, you may as well walk home together.”

I blushed, and bowed, murmuring something of the great honour which I should esteem it to be Miss Glendell’s escort; while the young girl expressed her pleasure with the arrangement in a much less embarrassed manner. “Only,” said she, “I must just say ‘How do you do?’ to Sally, lest she should think I had forgotten her.”

Sally was the cook at Seaview Cottage; and while Miss Glendell sought the kitchen, Mrs. Blunt enquired of me whether I did not think her protégée charming.

"Yes, indeed," said I earnestly. "But why never have spoken to me of this wonder?"

"Because I wished her to make her own impression upon you," returned she frankly. "There's a heroine for your new novel, Sir! None of your blue-sashed, bread-and-butter young misses, but a genuine—— Hush! here she comes.—Sally is as fat as ever, is she not?—Almost as fat as her mistress, you were going to say. Well, you were thinking so, at all events; naughty Rosa! —Good-bye, my darling; teach him French.—Good-bye, Marmy; introduce her to the British Classics.—Dear heart alive," added she with fervour, "what would I not give to be as young as you two!"

This pleasant old lady, our common friend, of course afforded us a ready subject for conversation; and, besides, there was Rosa's father to talk about, and my uncle, about whom she expressed herself curious to hear. Besides, there was each other's life history also, concerning which, at seventeen, one is by no means reticent. That of Rosa I was already in part acquainted with from her own lips; and she now completed what was wanting. Having lost her mother at an early age, and her aunt, who lived abroad, volunteering to take charge of her, Mr. Glendell had very unselfishly parted with his little daughter, for the sake of her own future benefit. His

widowed sister was reported (falsely as it turned out) to be in good circumstances, and it was hoped would make the child her heiress. But she had died poor. Rosa, declining to return home, to be a burden upon her father's scanty resources, had been educating herself for the last three years, with a view to getting her own living as a governess, which she was now fully competent to do.

As for me, I spoke of my own affairs with a candour that was half-frankness, half-egotism ; and they seemed to interest my new companion mightily. The idea of choosing literature for my profession in life delighted her ; much as a young gentleman in the middle ages might have pleased some youthful maiden by the confession that he intended to devote himself to knight-errantry.

She had been introduced through Mrs. Blunt to some eminent men of letters in France, all decorated with ribbons or crosses, and to whom Madame Boncieux had evinced an unwonted respect ; and she esteemed that calling very highly. Even in France, it was exceptional ; but in England, save our friend at Seaview Cottage, she had never met with an author. “How droll !” (this expression I did not quite approve of) ; “and had I written much ? And was it prose or poetry ?

She doted on poetry. They read Voltaire's *Henriade* and Lamartine's *Napoleon* at Madame Boncieux' And were these charming things in manuscript, or were they actually in print?" How I blessed the editor of the *Sandiford Mercury!* Twenty-four hours ago, I should have had to confess that I had never written anything that had been published ; but now I replied with affected carelessness that "some of my works were in print, and some were not : nay, it did so happen, by-the-bye, that I had in my pocket at that moment a printed copy—if she would do me the favour to accept it—of some verses addressed to her old friend and mine, Mrs. Eleanor Blunt."

I would not permit her to read them, as she wished to do, at once, upon the open road, which I did not consider a favourable spot for their proper appreciation ; but when we reached her home, and found the surgeon had not yet returned, the *Sonnet to ——* received the most favourable criticism ; and I promised, without much pressing, to show her some more productions by the same hand.

I was already charmed by this beautiful young creature's air and appearance ; but now that I had come to know the capabilities of her mind, "Here," said I to myself, "is Perfection indeed!"

When Mr. Glendell came home, we found he had been not only to Daisyport ; he had called at the Point on his way back, to see the ex-maharajah, upon whom he always now looked in twice or thrice a week.

“ You found my uncle better, I trust ? ” said I, after some talk.

“ Well, the fact is, Marmy,” observed the surgeon gravely, “ I am not easy about the ex-maharajah.”

“ Good Heaven ! Sir,” cried I, seizing my hat, “ is my uncle ill ? ”

“ Not in the sense you mean, my lad ; he is no worse than he was yesterday, for instance. But strong as he looks, and indeed is, as respects mere vigour, there is something wrong with his lungs, I feel convinced. I have persuaded him to-day, for the first time, to let me use the stethoscope ; and the result is far from encouraging.”

“ Oh, Sir,” said I, turning suddenly pale, and feeling my heart, that had just been beating so blithely, become as cold as a stone, “ must my dear uncle die ? ”

“ Nay, nay ; I don’t say that there is anything so serious the matter at present ; but his constitution, outwardly iron-plated, has a weak spot within—a fact which I believe he has himself long suspected. Whether that be so or not, he received what I thought it my duty to

tell him this afternoon with the utmost coolness. His only anxiety is upon your account, Marmy.—What a fine, brave, unselfish fellow he is ! ”

“ Yes, Mr. Glendell, and as tender-hearted as any woman.”

“ Ay, Marmy, he has been, indeed, as you once told me, mother as well as father to you. Against that, there is nothing to be said, for you have been a good and dutiful lad ; but this kindness of heart in him in some cases becomes mere weakness. I protest that the conduct of that Hindu villain, whose life he saved, but at the expense of his own health—for that night’s work upon the downs has brought out all the dormant mischief into activity—fairly makes my blood boil. At this moment, that copper-coloured villain is drunk ; and your uncle, who needed his attendance, and of course applied for it in vain, has nothing more severe to say than “ Poor fellow.” It’s worse than weakness—it’s downright wicked. Why, there are a dozen honest men in this village who would make Mr. Braydon good and faithful servants, in place of this lolloping heathen, and yet he persists in retaining him. Moreover, what seems so odd, I verily believe your uncle knows him to be a worthless scoundrel. What do you say, Marmy ? ”

"I don't think Uncle Theo has a very high opinion of him," said I evasively, for my conscience was still tender concerning the revelation I had already made upon this subject to Mrs. Blunt.

"Well, then, why does he keep him? Why does he put up with him? There must be some uncommonly strong reason for it, you know."

"I am sure I don't know, Mr. Glendell, nor even suspect."

"Then all I can say is, that you are a very stupid fellow (don't you think so, Rosey?) to have lived in the same house a dozen years, and never to have discovered the skeleton in the cupboard!"

"Sangaree Tannajee is not much like a skeleton," said I with a forced laugh, "as I am sure Miss Rosa will say when she has seen him."

"It's no laughing matter, Marmy," pursued the surgeon. "Setting aside the inconvenience of having such a brute in your house at all, it is just now absolutely necessary that your uncle should be closely looked after and well tended. He is careless of himself, and needs to be reminded to take his medicine, and the nourishing food that has become so necessary to him. Martha and Nancy are well-meaning women enough, but forgetful and boorish. A good body-servant would be, just now,

invaluable about your uncle, and instead of that, here is this drunken baboon."

"If you will only tell me, Mr. Glendell, what you wish my uncle to do," pleaded I, "I will answer for it nothing shall be forgotten; he need not surely require a servant when I am by his side to minister to his wants. It would be a very small return to make to him for all he has done for me, even should I become his valet and his nurse."

"My good lad, I know all that," said the surgeon approvingly; "but, unfortunately, he would never let you do him any such service; although, from a servant who knows his duties, he might accept it as a matter of course."

"It seems to me," said Miss Glendell rising, and putting an arm round her father's neck, "that this dear ex-maharajah, whom you and everybody love so much, is one of those impracticable persons who hate, even when ill, to give their fellow-creatures trouble, and have an absurd disinclination to be nursed."

"That's just so, my dear," answered the surgeon, chuckling with pride, as a hen chuckles over some promising chick. "You could not have described him better had you known him all your life."

"Very well, papa, then I tell you what I mean to do,

now I shall have so much idle time on my hands. Among other accomplishments I learned at Madame Boncieux'—where there is a school infirmary—I learned to nurse; and I shall just take this ex-maharajah into my own hands, and nurse him myself, without his knowing it."





CHAPTER IX.

MRS. BLUNT SEES HALF THROUGH THE MILLSTONE.

ET was customary with Rosa Glendell, as I came in time to learn, to say as wise and true things in jest as most people can compass in earnest. She had accurately described my dear uncle's characteristic when she called him "impracticable" as a patient. She had undertaken to nurse him without his knowing it, and she went through with that. Of course, Mr. Glendell took an early opportunity of bringing her with him to "the Point," and she made conquest of the ex-maharajah on the spot. This result astonished nobody but herself; but it was the most complete success imaginable. My uncle was actually induced, because her lovely hands had brewed it, to take a cup of tea—a beverage I had never seen him touch;

and he pronounced it admirable ; nay, he was even heard to murmur something about the sugar being unnecessary, during the delivery of which sentence he blushed profusely. We never had so merry an evening in our little home before. The host exerted himself to amuse his youthful guest in the most unwonted manner ; everything he possessed that was rare and curious was taken from its repository, and received its appropriate history. The cause of this was, in the first place, the admiration which my uncle entertained of Rosa's character : the efforts she had made to support herself ; her self-denial and self-exile—all which he had heard from her father's lips. But it was impossible for him to resist her personal attraction. When she left us that night, it seemed that the house had lost something much more than a beautiful ornament. “The presence of that excellent girl, Marmy, positively does me good,” said my uncle, between the puffs of his cheroot.

So Rosa came to our house to teach me French, instead of my going to Mr. Glendell's. By the end of the week, I showed her the portrait of the Begum, and assured her that she had effectually erased the memory of that interesting female in the ex-maharajah's heart.

The surgeon expressed a hope that his daughter would bear herself meekly, if chosen to succeed so eminent a

personage, and not be supercilious to her nephew by marriage.

As to my uncle, he openly expressed his regret that a man might not marry his granddaughter. He submitted to this charming creature's dictation without resistance, and from her hand would take anything that was good for him. Always kindly and good-humoured, he was now become quite jocose and sprightly. Mr. Glendell seemed to grow younger daily from the time his daughter returned home. As for me, I dwelt in the seventh heaven, only descending from it to write my novel, which I wished, above all things, to make worthy of the approbation I knew would be bestowed upon it by this new critic, so much easier to please than the literary veteran at Seaview Cottage.

Those were happy, happy days.

The only person in our household, and, indeed, in the village itself, who did not seem to be touched by the wand of this good fairy, and altered for the better, was Sangaree Tannajee. He ought to have been at least grateful to this young girl, who took all trouble off his hands, as respected his sick master's needs, and smiled even on himself—for she was like the sun, that smiles upon the unjust as well as on the just—but he only scowled upon her as he did upon everybody else. He

was jealous of her influence with my uncle, notwithstanding that he himself never strove to gain any : and doubtless he disliked her for liking me. Insolent as he was, however, he did not venture openly to show this. He was not deficient in cunning ; and perhaps he felt that any impertinence to Miss Glendell would be the one thing that my uncle would not pass over.

Rosa and I were very diligent as teacher and pupil, and again as pupil and teacher. I hardly know which I enjoyed most, the learning or the teaching ; the listening to her soft clear tones making music of a strange tongue, or the reciting to her the melodies of Keats, and Shelley, and Coleridge—my favourite poets, and whom I wished her to love as I did.

When she was not by my side, I worked hard, but not hurriedly, at my novel. It was not worth much, of course, but it was at least twice as good, thanks to Mrs. Blunt's advice, as my last crude attempt at fiction.

At the end of six months, I took what I had written to Seaview Cottage ; and, in a few days, repaired thither again for judgment.

I was by no means so nervous this time as when I was edited before. I was conscious of improvement ; and, besides, there was nothing to be decided upon on this occasion as regarded my future calling.

“There is one thing, Marmy, that has interested me greatly in your novel,” was the old lady’s first remark.

“My dear Mrs. Blunt,” said I, reddening to the ear-tips, “I am delighted to hear it. What is it?”

“Well, Marmy, I take a lively interest in young people’s ‘goings-on,’ as we say at Sandiford; and your novel has convinced me that you are in love.”

I blushed from head to heel.

“It’s perfectly charming,” continued the old lady, “and just as it should be—your united ages being thirty-five, and neither of you having a shilling to call your own.”

“I could not help it, Madam,” pleaded I, with simplicity.

“Of course not. You would have been a heartless young wretch, only fit to make money, if you had failed to fall in love with Rosa Glendell. But still, you have not begun to think of marriage, have you?”

Notwithstanding her good-natured banter, I saw there was something serious in my kind critic’s mind.

“No, indeed, Madam: it would be very foolish to do so, for the reasons that you have named. I will not attempt to hide from you—although I did not know that I had revealed it in my story—that I do love Rosa with all

my heart. I would die to save her little finger from hurt; I worship the very ——”

“Yes, yes; that’s all *here*, my dear,” said the old lady, pointing to the tell-tale pages. “But have you told her so?”

“We have promised never, never to marry anybody except each other,” murmured I bashfully.

“And your uncle and her father, do they know of this eternal compact?”

“No, Madam.”

“My poor boy,” said the old lady tenderly, laying her still plump hand upon my shoulder, “you are dreaming, you two—you are not living in this world at all. I have lived there more than seventy years, and know how things really turn out. Rosa Glendell, who is a most charming girl, and has had a first-rate education in Paris, will presently marry a most respectable banker, a widower of about fifty-six.”

“What banker, Madam?” exclaimed I indignantly. “I am sure that if Mr. Glendell has any such intention of disposing of his daughter’s hand, she will never obey him.”

“You wish her to wait for you, then, Marmy—to wait, and wait, until, perhaps, her beautiful black hair turns gray, and she is no longer worth waiting for?”

“Madam,” cried I, “I will not listen to such words.

Why do you insult me thus? I have won her love: I hope to prove myself worthy of it. I will work—God help me—like ten men, to earn a living for us both; and she is not a mere child of fashion, to whom every luxury is a necessary; she is a brave good girl—the bravest, best in England.—And please, Madam, I will take my manuscript away, and not trouble you.” I never was so angry with anyone in my life, not even with Sambo, and I am afraid I made a snatch at the parcel.

“Nay, Sir,” said the old lady, holding up a reproving finger; “you should not treat me so indeed. If I have the misfortune to be obliged to write for my living, I am a gentlewoman still.”

“I had not forgotten that indeed,” said I, humbled to the very dust, “but only that I was myself a gentleman. Forget it, and forgive me, my dear Madam. I am behaving like a brute, but indeed I scarcely know what I do. To hear that my sweet Rosa is to marry a banker, who is a widower of fifty-six—it makes me mad to think of it!”

“My good Marmy,” said the old lady soothingly, “there is no particular banker in the case, I do assure you. I was merely casting Rosa’s horoscope. From my experience of life, I judged that such a thing was likely to happen—that’s all. Everything does turn out so exactly

the reverse of what youth pictures to itself. You must not be angry with me for reasoning from analogy, instead of being transported by your passion. I am not (as I said) at all surprised at your falling in love with Rosa, nor, I may add, you very nice boy (only you are not so good-tempered as I thought you were), at her reciprocating your attachment. But I don't like these serious promises of marriage between young folks who are poor; a long engagement of this sort generally ends in the self-sacrifice of the girl. In this case, here is a penniless lad, upon the threshold of the most uncertain profession in the world, exacting a promise—well, at all events, interchanging promises of eternal fidelity—with one whose chief attraction, beauty, will fade in course of time, whose value in the matrimonial market, to speak the bare truth, will be depreciated with every year. I say you have no right to call upon her to nullify her own natural advantages, to destroy her chance in life for such a far-off contingency as you can offer. In short, Marmy, you are acting very selfishly in this matter, although I am sure you were unaware of it. You see what I mean now, don't you?"

"Indeed, I do, Madam," sighed I; "and my duty is plain enough. I will release Rosa at once from her engagement. I am very much obliged to you for pointing

out what ought to be done, Mrs. Blunt : and you have broken my heart in doing it."

How strange it seems, looking back on that scene now, through the many intervening years, that I should have been obliged to hide my face in my hands, lest that old woman should see my tears ; but I did cry like a child. I had such confidence, you see, in my mentor's sagacity and wisdom, that I felt things must all turn out as she foretold, and that I and Rosa were never to be man and wife.

And ah ! how I loved that girl !

Then, when I looked up at last with as cheerful a face as I could compass, I saw Mrs. Eleanor Blunt was crying also. "Don't cry, Marmy," said she ; "that's very foolish : it is time for tears when everything else fails."

"Everything has failed, or will fail," murmured I gloomily. "You have told me so yourself."

"No, Marmy ; I have not said that. You may release Rosa from her promise, and yet marry her, if things turn out well ! You have two strings to your bow, yet, remember. In the first place, there is this book of yours—a most creditable performance for so very young an author. You have improved in your style, my dear, immensely."

I shook my head : my case was past receiving comfort from "improvement of style."

"Now, if this novel has even a very moderate success, Marmy," continued the old lady cheerfully, "it may place you at once in a position to earn your own living. It will then become only a question of time for you to earn enough for two. Supposing it to be finished, and to extend over three volumes of print, then the question will be, how to get it brought out. Do you think the ex-maharajah could spare a hundred pounds or so, to get it published on your own account?"

"I am quite sure he could not, Mrs. Blunt: we are growing poor up at 'the Point' yonder; I can see that, although my uncle would conceal the fact. I would not ask him for a penny."

"First books are sometimes published by subscription," remarked the old lady thoughtfully. "Now, how would that be?"

"Well, Madam, my uncle would subscribe; and perhaps Mr. Glendell; and then, since you are so kind, there would be a chance of one more. Besides those," added I bitterly, "I don't know of anybody else that would be——"

"Fool enough," ejaculated Mrs. Blunt, completing my unfinished sentence. "An edition of three!" Her plump shoulders began to "wobble," and her eyes to twinkle with suppressed mirth.

For my part, I was intensely grave. "I should not like publishing by subscription," said I, "in any case. Nothing but rubbish comes out in that way."

"I won't say that, my dear, because my own first book was published by subscription," observed the old lady. "But you are quite right in the main. I have found cause to repent of it myself. Everybody who put down his guinea on that occasion, of course made me his debtor, and some of them have taken out the obligation since in patronage of a most unpleasant sort. There is a master-butcher who sometimes reminds me to this day that but for his one-pound-one, laid down half a century ago, nobody would ever have heard of Eleanor Blunt. That is what one may call exacting compound interest, which the law holds to be usurious, even when one raises money on one's expectations. Drat the man!"

The picture of this master-butcher (perhaps in blue) introducing Mrs. Blunt into the Temple of Fame upset even my gravity.

"There are lots more," continued she comically, "of the same sort, only not quite so bad. Most of my original patrons are gone where there is nobody (I hope) to patronise; but some of their offspring or executors have not given up their lien upon my reputation yet. A few of those are, moreover, in such bad circumstances, that I

have paid all the money twice over in hard cash. Yes, you are certainly right, Marmy, not to bring out your novel by subscription."

"But how is it to be brought out, Mrs. Blunt?"

"Well, it must take its chance in 'the Row,' Marmy,"—it must find a publisher for itself. Fortunately for you, my own mishap with those gentry—five of whom missed a fortune by rejecting me—has made the road to publication smoother than it was. Sooner or later, this manuscript is sure to be in print, Marmy: I will promise you that; though, in my opinion, the later it happens the better."

This was but cold comfort, after all the depressing things with which Mrs. Blunt had treated me during this interview; and I did not feel so grateful for it as perhaps I ought to have done.

"You said there was another string to my bow, Madam—may I ask to what you were referring?"

"Well, that is a subject, Marmy," answered she hesitatingly, "upon which you have shown some unwillingness to enter. But it is my earnest hope that your trump-card may turn out to be something apart from literature altogether. I have been thinking a good deal of that conversation we had together, six months ago, concerning—I won't say the secret between your uncle and his

servant, since you wish to respect it, but concerning those future expectations of which Mr. Braydon hinted. It is now plain to me from his expression : ‘I may be rich, and you almost certainly will be,’ that everything hinges upon the question of survivorship. If somebody or other dies before your uncle, the ex-maharajah will come into the property ; and if your uncle dies, and you survive this said person, you will reap the same benefit. Mr. Braydon being so much your senior, has, of course, a less prospect of inheritance than yourself, which fully accounts for his observation. Again, by the way in which he speaks of that prospect — for he *may* be a rich man himself, he says—it seems to me that he has about an equal chance of survivorship with this unknown person.”

“ I think you are right,” cried I suddenly. “ I remember now to have seen my uncle more than once poring over a little book all composed of figures, and which I think was called the *Tables of Annuity*; but to my knowledge, he has not done so for these many months.”

“ Just so, my dear ; that is because he feels himself far from well, poor fellow. His chance is no more, as it used to be, a matter of simple calculation.—Now, how old is this Sangaree Tannajee ? His looks are not much of a

guide ; but allowing for the effects of opium and a bad temper, I should judge him to be about his master's age."

"I have heard my uncle say that Tannajee is by two years his senior."

"Just what I expected, Marmy," chuckled the old lady triumphantly. "The master, then, until within these six months, had a slight advantage over the man. You may depend upon it that somehow or other—else why did your uncle say, when he saved his life, that he had resisted a great temptation?—that unpleasant Hindu, valueless as he appears to himself and to everybody else, stands between you and a great fortune."

"Then what is it you recommend me to do, Madam ? To put him to death ? "

"No, Marmy ; because, although very nice, that would be dangerous and wrong. I advise you, for the present, to stick to literature. But have your eyes wide open—not to spy upon your uncle—I am the last person to propose such a thing as that, I hope—but to keep a very sharp look-out on Sangaree Tannajee."

"But what can he, personally at least, have to do with wealth of any sort, my dear Madam ? "

"I don't know, my dear ; I only know your uncle took very great pains indeed to prevent his running away from

you ; and it's my belief that your hope of winning Rosa Glendell lies not so much in the success of this novel, as in retaining that Hindu vagabond's services *for life.*"





CHAPTER X.

I BRING THE HINDU TO REASON.

AS the summer advanced, my uncle seemed to improve in health, and thereby supplied the one thing that was lacking to the happiness of our little household, in which—since they were so often with us—I include Mr. Glendell and Rosa. But his spirits did not rise proportionately; they were very variable—almost always good when our pleasant neighbours were with us, but flagging, although he strove his best to keep them up, when we were alone. In the solitude of his own room, I had good reason to fear that they broke down altogether. His complaint still tormented him at night, for I often heard his hard dry cough for a whole hour together; and sometimes (though seldom now) he would get up and sit in a chair, for greater ease of breathing.

From this, since I call him "better," it may be judged how very ill he had been ; but the doctor expressed himself of good hope that his patient had "turned the corner," and would be tolerably strong before the ensuing winter. It would have been desirable for my uncle to have sought during that season a home less exposed to wind and storms than Hershell Point ; but we all knew that it was useless to attempt to persuade him to do so. Like most men at an advanced age who have no domestic ties, which make a home wherever we carry them, he clung tenaciously to his own place.

Rosa, as before, could do anything with him short of getting him away ; but he was as disinclined to be ministered to by anyone else as ever. Often and often I have got up, hearing him in pain and trouble, and gone no further than the door of his room, where I have waited for an hour without going in, so well I knew that such an evidence of solicitude upon his account would distress him. But upon one occasion about this time I experienced a novel cause of alarm. I had not heard my uncle cough at all that night, which I ascribed to my having slept more heavily than usual after a long day's walk ; but I was awakened by hearing him move about in the study. The moon was shining at intervals through clouds, and I saw by my watch that it was about two o'clock in the

morning. The house, of course, was profoundly still, or the noise of his slippers, or, as it seemed, naked feet could not have reached my ears. It would not have aroused me of itself, but a chair, or something he had probably stumbled over in the dark, had fallen.

I had never known him go into that room, which lay on the other side of mine from his own, at night before. There was some brandy there, of which perhaps he was in search ; but if so, he must be much more unwell than usual. I slipped out of bed, and softly approached the study-door, which stood ajar. The name of this apartment, as has been hinted, was a misnomer, for it did not boast of half-a-dozen books, and even the desk had very rarely any ink in it. There was a cupboard, in which were kept the brandy and my uncle's cheroots ; and the turning-lathe and a few chairs were all the furniture. It was not even entirely carpeted, the spaces next the wall being quite bare. If they had not been so, I should not have heard the footsteps at all. I could now hear nothing, and the moon was hid, so that I could see nothing, as I watched and waited in the dark passage. Presently, however, I heard a click, which I recognised at once ; the desk made that noise whenever it was opened, which was often enough, for my uncle kept all his housekeeping money there, and characteristically

enough, not under lock and key. There was the sealed packet there also, but nothing else. What could my uncle possibly want at such an hour out of his desk? The idea of a burglar never entered into my mind; such a being at Hershell Point was more rare than the dinornis: he was only not extinct because he had never existed. I heard the muffled chink of money, as if it was being counted coin by coin, and I noticed there were fewer than usual kept in the desk. A fidgety man, who fancied he had made some mistake in his domestic calculations, might perhaps have risen even in the night to assure himself respecting them; but my uncle was not fidgety. There was now another noise, which I had only once heard before; the secret spring had been touched, and the drawer containing the packet rattled out. At this moment the clouds cleared away from the moon, and I saw a figure standing against the window with something in his hand. I have no recollection of doing so, but perhaps I gave an involuntary start. In an instant the figure turned, and I fled swiftly and noiselessly to my own chamber, though not so fast but that ere I entered it my ear caught once more the snap of the spring, and the click of the desk. Directly afterwards a door was softly shut, and I heard my uncle's short dry cough on the other side of my room.

I would not have had him find me thus spying on his actions for ten times the gold in his desk, and I lay for a minute or two with beating heart, and scarcely venturing to breathe. But presently I began to consider, was it possible for such an invalid to have left the study and reached his chamber within that short space? The partition between our rooms was thin, and yet I had not heard the bedstead creak, as it was wont to do when it received the weight of the still stalwart ex-maharajah. Perhaps it was not my uncle at all who had visited the study. Who then could it have been? Who else had any right to count the money in the desk? or supposing that had been done with some dishonest motive, who could possibly have any concern with the packet except one person, Sangaree Tannajee? I slept no more that night, but listened for every sound. If the Hindu's door had opened again, he would have found me armed—for my uncle had recently given me a pair of ancient pistols, beautifully inlaid, with which I practised shooting daily—and resolute to prevent his leaving the house. But all was still. What strengthened my suspicion that he might have premeditated some abominable *coup*, such as robbery and flight, was the fact that he had kept himself sober the preceding evening.

At breakfast, in answer to my enquiry, my uncle in-

formed me that he had passed a particularly quiet night, his cough having scarcely harassed him at all.

"Then you did not rise and go into the study for brandy?" said I, as carelessly as I could. "I certainly thought I heard you, and was afraid you were unwell."

"Certainly not, Marmy. You are too anxious about me," said he, with a little annoyance in his manner." I felt greatly better last night; and so far from running about the house, I scarcely even turned on my pillow. You must have been dreaming."

My uncle was incapable of dissimulation, far less of a lie. I knew therefore at once whose figure it was that I had seen standing at the study-window; the only question was, should I reveal what I had seen? I decided to consult Mr. Glendell upon this point, and I did so. The surgeon was aware of all that I knew myself respecting the mysterious connection of the Hindu with my uncle's fortunes, but he was not so curious about it as Mrs. Eleanor Blunt was. Doctors, generally speaking, know too much of the secrets of their fellow-creatures to be greatly interested in such matters; and they are honourably discreet about what they know. With the exception of his jocose allusion to the skeleton in our household, he had never pressed me upon the matter, and for that very reason I had been the more induced, when I came to know him

intimately, to repose in him my whole confidence. He had not been communicative of his ideas upon the subject; but when I told him what Mrs. Blunt had said regarding it, he had nodded acquiescence in her views, and remarked drily that "that old lady ought to have been a Bobby"—by which I understood him to mean a detective policeman.

He congratulated me on my good sense in having concealed what I had witnessed on the night in question from my uncle.

"Half his disease, my dear Marmy," said he, "is attributable to worry, anxiety of mind, and that's why Rosa and I make a home of your house: the more he is won from the solitude of his own thoughts the better; bad news, in particular, should be studiously kept from him; and what you now tell me is *very* bad news. It is clear to me, that if there had been more shots in the locker, more money in the till, that white-brown scoundrel would have bolted with it last night. What he wanted with the packet, I can't tell. Perhaps, having decided not to *decamp*, he only wished to assure himself that it was there. That he knows it contains something of importance, I have not the slightest doubt; but to steal it while his master lives can do him no good, since your uncle would, I conclude, simply have to rewrite the thing.

Well, you must let this fellow know that you have your eye upon him—that you are not deceived in his character, although his master may be—in short, you must make him afraid of you, and that will not be difficult, for he is not, I should fancy, remarkable for personal courage."

"He is the most cowardly cur," said I contemptuously. "How he could ever have cut his way through the Begum's troopers in that brilliant manner he used to describe to me when I was a child, I cannot imagine."

"Your uncle was behind him with a loaded pistol, my good lad—one of the most powerful incentives to bravery it is possible to conceive. He had got all the ex-maharajah's money and jewels about him, and was well aware that he would not be permitted to indulge in pusillanimity—it would have been too expensive a luxury just then."

"Very well," said I grimly, "I will endeavour to convince him that to run away from Hershell Point with our housekeeping money would be a dear-bought amusement also. I will show this villain that since our last little affair together, 'Master Marmy,' as he still has the impudence to call me, has grown to be a man."

The opportunity I wished for of coming to an understanding with the Hindu did not occur for many weeks, during which he gave me constant occasion for desiring

it. Twice, under the influence of bhang, he was most impertinent in his manner towards Miss Glendell ; and nothing but her own earnest entreaties, and consideration for my uncle's health, which any mental agitation would be sure to injure, prevented my taking vengeance on his fat carcass. Within the last few months I had grown surprisingly both in length and strength, and felt myself no longer an antagonist such as that hulking scoundrel could afford to despise. But it was not a mere thrashing that could effect any permanent improvement in him, although, without doubt, it would do him good.

At last my chance arrived. My uncle announced his intention, one morning, of accompanying Mr. Glendell in his gig to Daisyport, where the surgeon had an appointment ; so that, in case of any explosion of Tannajee's wrath taking place (in consequence of what I proposed), the smoke would have time to evaporate, as it were, before his master's return, who might therefore be spared all knowledge of the matter.

It was very seldom that my uncle now left the house, except for an hour or two ; and no sooner had he departed on this occasion, than, as I fully anticipated, Tannajee proceeded to get comfortably fuddled upon such liquors as he had by him in his own room. I did not molest him in that apartment, first, because it lay near

the kitchen, and I was unwilling that Martha or Nancy should be listeners to our altercation ; and secondly, because it was important that what I had to say should be said in the study, whither I well knew he would presently repair to enjoy his master's cheroots. Accordingly, as soon as the smoke thereof informed me of his being there, I slipped into my own room for an article which I placed into my coat-pocket, and then presented myself at the study-door. The Hindu was seated cross-legged on the carpet as usual, a bundle of cheroots on one side of him, and the brandy bottle on the other ; it was a liquor he did not get hold of every day, though he liked it best of all, even better than opium ; and he looked perfectly well satisfied with his position. Not a trace of embarrassment appeared in his features at being thus discovered in this act of petty larceny ; but they were darkened with a scowl at the intrusion of so unwelcome a visitor.

“ You need not rise, Tannajee,” said I, although, indeed, he had not moved a limb. “ I must have a few minutes’ conversation with you, and we might as well both be comfortable after our several fashions ; ” and I took a chair immediately opposite to him.

He did not utter a word ; but I knew by the puffing of his cheroot, that my manner caused him some excitement, if not alarm.

"We are not very good friends, you and I, Sambo," (I could not resist that word, when I saw the gleam of hate that lit up his fishy eyes); "but it is not about that I am come to talk to you: it is about my uncle, Theo, and your conduct towards him."

By no means the least provoking of the Hindu's characteristics was his pretence, whenever it suited him, of not being able to understand the English language, with which he was in reality well acquainted, and he affected this ignorance now.

"The maharajah's out, Master Marmy," said he—"gone to Daisyport, to catch another cold."

"You ungrateful scoundrel," cried I indignantly, although I had made up my mind to keep my temper; "you dare to sneer at your master's illness, which he incurred in saving your own worthless life!"

"The maharajah is very ill; he will die soon, and leave Master Marmy all alone, except for the little black girl. But she cannot become his wife, because he will have no money."

"If ever you dare to speak of Miss Glendell in that manner again," cried I, hoarse with passion, "I will beat you to a mummy—not merely kick you as I did before." My cheeks were aflame, my whole frame tingled with rage, and yet I knew that I should spoil all if I hurried matters.

The Hindu had placed his hand in his girdle, doubtless feeling for some weapon, and the dusky glow upon his face showed me that he felt the taunt.

“I repeat, Tannajee, I am not come here to talk of my own affairs at all, but rather of yours.”

“Of mine!” answered the Hindu contemptuously.

“Yes, of yours, and your master’s. You have a common interest, you know.”

It was indiscreet of me to have hazarded this remark, and too late I perceived my folly.

The Hindu’s breathing became oppressed ; his fingers clutched at what his girdle still kept concealed, and his cheroot dropped from his other hand upon the floor.

“Uncle Theo, then, has told his nephew something,” said he slowly.

It seemed to me that this man would have stabbed me to the heart, had I answered : “I know all.”—“Nay,” said I, as unconcernedly as I could, “he has told me nothing except concerning your long service, the many years you have lived together as master and man ; which should surely beget a mutual regard. Why, then, does it not so? Why are you callous to his sufferings? Why do you repay his kindness with insult?”

The Hindu’s temporary excitement had quite subsided ;

he was smoking as before with his eyes half closed, and a sottish sneer upon his lip.

“You are not moved by these reproaches, Sangaree Tannajee. You have neither sense of gratitude nor of duty; but there is one thing which I am determined to put a stop to—you shall not again walk in your sleep, my friend.”

For once I do believe that the Hindu’s air of not understanding what was said to him was not feigned—he even exhibited some faint trace of interest in my last observation.

“Sleep-walk?” said he. “What does Master Marmy mean? Brandy not good for boy like him, only for men like Tannajee.”

“Master Marmy is sober enough, Sambo,” replied I very gravely; “and this is what he means. You must not again come here, into this study, at night, to open your master’s desk, and count his money, nor meddle with that secret drawer—*Chorwallah!*”

The Hindu had been gathering together his supple limbs while I was speaking, but at the word chorwallah (thief), which (as has been written) I had once overheard my uncle apply to him with particular emphasis, he was upon me in a moment with his naked knife; at the same instant, the shining barrel of my

pistol met his wicked face, and he shrank from it, an incarnation of baffled fury and cringing fear, back to the very wall.

“Drop that ugly knife, you scoundrel, drop it,” cried I, “before I count three, or by Heavens I pull this trigger. One—two !”

The weapon fell from his trembling hand, and clanged upon the boarded floor.

“Now, sit down where you were sitting, and listen to me, Tannajee.”

He cowered upon the carpet like a flogged hound, murmuring abjectly : “Yes—yes ; put away the pistol, Master Marmy.”

“No, not Master Marmy,” said I sternly ; for the future, it must be always Mr. Marmaduke. You must henceforth mend your manners to me, as well as to your master. Let there be no more disrespect, no more rebellion, and as little drunkenness as you can help, you sot. A word from me, remember”—I pointed to the violated desk—“and I can send you to jail, where there is no opium, no strong drinks, and no cheroots. You have had your own way long enough, and have now come to the end of your tether. There is nothing left for you but either to behave yourself properly in my uncle’s service, or to run away.”

I saw a momentary gleam of satisfaction cross his listening face.

"But you won't run away, you cur," continued I with stern distinctness, "for this most excellent reason, because if I catch you at it, or overtake you, after having done so, I will blow your brains out, as surely as your name is Sangaree Tannajee."

This threat was perhaps not quite authorised in a legal point of view, but no decree of *Ne exeat Regno* could have had so much effect upon its object as had these pregnant words, assisted as they were by the application of the cold iron of the pistol-barrel to the ear-tip of the trembling Hindu. To add anything to that last touch would I felt be a bathos; so I rose without another word, and left Tannajee to his reflections.





CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRTH OF BRIGADOON.

BEING appointed year passed by, and my novel was completed, revised, and corrected. The title of this work (more than which of it I do not intend to inflict upon the present public) was *Brigadoon*, a name which I flattered myself was original, and (it will be at least conceded) did not reveal too much of the nature of its contents. It was affectionately dedicated to Mrs. Eleanor Blunt, but beyond that I was determined that she should have no connection with it; it was not to profit in any way by her influence, but stand or fall entirely on its own merits. I even declined to make use of her introduction to an eminent publisher, but sent him the precious manuscript myself, with a modest note. By return of post I received a civil reply, to say that

Brigadoon had been received in safety, and would have the “best attention” of the gentleman employed by Messrs. Putforth in such cases ; as though that great work were out of health, and needed medical advice. In about a fortnight I got the notes of its diagnosis—the “Reader’s” verdict. “I have perused with great care, and very considerable interest, the manuscript entitled *Brigadoon*. It exhibits talent of no common order. Some scenes, especially that in which young Tarbarrel defies his grandmother, exhibit remarkable power ; the humour is original and genuine ; the pathos simple but touching.”

There were, in short, three pages of letter-paper, in a beautiful hand, eulogising my novel in this agreeable style ; but the fourth page, like a lady’s postscript, contained the pith of the matter. This complimentary gentleman therein expressed much regret that “the present state of the book-trade, especially as respected novels,” prevented his being able to recommend Messrs. Putforth to undertake the publication of the manuscript entitled *Brigadoon*.

I have no doubt the “Reader” understood his business, and that this formula was the established one for rejection with the great house of Putforth. Perhaps it is even imagined that it “lets down” an author easily, and

makes him as content with a denial as the nature of things permits. But for my part, I would just as soon have been without this elaborate and ornate criticism, out of which came nothing at all.

Mrs. Eleanor Blunt "wobbled" not a little when she read it. "Somewhere or other, I've got Messrs. Putforth's verdict upon my own book—that which made my reputation, and Messrs. Bindem's fortune. It is years ago now, but they build upon the same lines still." She opened her great desk, and from one of its numberless pigeon-holes took out a bundle of faded letters. "Ah, Marmy," sighed she, "what a history of a literary life might be compiled from what I shall leave behind me.—Here it is. No; that is one from the same firm soliciting the honour of 'bringing out your next production ;' a very different affair, indeed, of which I hope you will soon have an experience. Yes; this is it, with a frank in the corner; some connection of the house was an M.P. Old Putforth was himself alive at that time, and I have a very strong suspicion was his own Reader. Every publisher who is his own Reader, Marmy, has a fool to decide for him. Let us hear what he says : 'I have perused with great care, and very considerable interest——'"

Here we both roared with laughter—indeed, we could

scarcely get on with this remarkable document at all. It was almost a fac-simile of the letter I had myself received that morning, except that “the scene in which young Tarbarrel defies his grandmother” was the scene between two other folks. In the fourth page, “the present state of the book-trade, especially as regarded novels,” alone prevented the Messrs. Putforth’s undertaking the publication of the accompanying manuscript.

In spite of my disappointment, we had quite a merry afternoon over that letter. “ You see, my dear Marmy, you only suffer the common lot.”

“ Or, rather, only like my betters,” said I smiling.

“ Well, yes : my book was a better book by a long way than *Brigadoon*,” returned the old lady composedly. “ Still, yours has great promise, and they are wrong not to undertake it. We must strive to find wiser folks, Marmy—that’s all. Perhaps we were wrong not to try one of the younger firms, which are always the more enterprising. You must not be cast down, even if you have many such denials. Remember Bruce and the spider ; to which last genus it is said the publishers belong. Not, however, that I altogether endorse that statement. They do not always suck the blood of authors with impunity. I don’t mean only because we

generally disagree with them ; they even lose money by us occasionally—they do indeed ;” and the recollection, doubtless, of some transaction in which Mrs. Eleanor Blunt had gotten the better of a publisher, shook her plump frame.

Acting upon this experienced lady’s advice, I sent *Brigadoon* to seek his fortunes elsewhere, and this not twice nor three times only. Never was the proverb, “ Better luck next time,” pushed to more extreme limits than in his case. “The present state of the book trade, especially as regarded novels,” was always the insuperable obstacle, like the black bar in Bradshaw, that prevented his arriving at publication. Once, indeed, in the case of Messrs. Tyro and Tupkins, a firm justly celebrated for introducing young authors to the public, *Brigadoon* met with the most promising reception. Tyro liked him, and Tupkins was charmed with him. They even expressed their opinion that he would make a considerable sensation, and warmly undertook to bring him out. I was so delighted with their courteous epistle, that I honestly told them that money would be a secondary object with me, if the book should only appear in their forthcoming list of “new works ;” but at the same time, as I had expended more than a year’s labour upon it, I should expect a small pecuniary compensation, the

amount of which I left to themselves. In reply to this “gushing” offer, Messrs. Tyro and Tupkins presented me with their best compliments, and the information that they never published anything at their own expense, but would make their terms, in my particular case, a hundred guineas down, and a written guarantee for the disposal of a hundred copies.

So *Brigadoon* returned to me for the fifth time or so, still in manuscript, although by no means in the same state of virgin purity in which he had originally left Hershell Point—his blots picked out with a penknife, his stains cleaned by india-rubber, and stitched together with ribbon by the fair hands of Rosa herself. *Brigadoon* was now dog’s-eared and dirty, and presented to the experienced eye most undoubted evidence of his having been a rejected manuscript. Yet, strange to say, with appearances thus against him, and when his parent himself had almost given up the hope of witnessing his début, a publisher was at last discovered. I have beheld many gentlemen of that profession since (some of whom I am proud to call my friends)—wise-eyed, benevolent-mouthed, and altogether prepossessing—but I never met with one who looked so like an angel as *at that time* Mr. Percival Swete appeared in my eyes. Perhaps I should scarcely have believed in his existence had I not

seen him in the flesh, which came about in the following fashion.

He had received poor *Brigadoon* in the usual course, and written to say that he approved of him ; and with regard to business arrangements, as nothing was like a personal interview, and as he happened to have business down at Daisyport, which it seemed was my post-town, perhaps I would have the goodness to do him the favour of coming over on a certain day, and taking a chop with him at the *Bear and Pineapple*, when we could talk the affair over. The tone of his communication—so frank, so friendly, so different from anything I had hitherto experienced—took my heart by storm, and I accepted his invitation with rapture. My uncle gave me leave to try and persuade Mr. Swete to visit “the Point,” “for,” said he, “a man who writes like that must be a genial fellow.” I felt quite indignant with Mrs. Eleanor Blunt for not coinciding in this rose-coloured view of my new correspondent. Mr. Swete, said she drily, had not the best of reputations in the Row, and for her part she did not admire his plan of “talking the affair over” with a young gentleman of eighteen. She hinted, in fact, that this was synonymous with talking *me* over, and exacted a promise that whatever agreement he should come to, should be expressed in writing. Whatever suspicion she

contrived to arouse in my confiding bosom was, however, at once set at rest when I beheld Mr. Swete himself. Instead of the bald-headed, benevolent man of substance I had pictured to myself, fifty years of age at least, and of ample girth, I found a young fellow, only ten years my senior, tall and slim, with a tawny moustache, and an impulsive, not to say off-hand manner.

"I like *Brigadoon*," said he, after we had dined together ; "and I like you, Mr. Drake. This interview is more satisfactory to me, and I hope to us both, than any amount of correspondence. We know one another now, and can trust one another. I will put your book at once in the hands of my printers, and you shall correct the proof-sheets ; there will doubtless be a few amendments, but you will find my people very accurate in their work."

Mr. Percival Swete had made such constant reference to his "people" during our brief interview, that I felt convinced he employed quite an army of subordinates, that his establishment was on a vast scale, and his publishing business — which he called his "operations" — gigantic. A hundred pounds more or less would certainly be nothing to a person of his wealth ; but still he had not even hinted at the price which he was

willing to pay for *Brigadoon*; and I felt a delicacy in alluding to money-matters. On the other hand, I was bound to perform my promise to Mrs. Blunt. "With regard to the — the pecuniary remuneration," said I, hesitatingly. I had hoped Mr. Swete would help me out here, but he only puffed vigorously at his cigar, so that I could scarcely see him through the clouds of tobacco-smoke. "I should be content," continued I, "with a very modest sum. Still, I have worked hard at the novel ; and——"

"Just so, Mr. Drake," interrupted my companion with a pleasant smile ; "the labourer is worthy of his hire. But in the case of an unknown author like yourself, the profits of a novel are so ridiculously small. In point of fact, I only undertake *Brigadoon* in the hope of securing your second attempt to achieve a reputation : I look to the promise rather than to the performance. I do not myself expect any immediate pecuniary return whatever. —You cannot be induced to take a cigar ? Well, that taste will come in time ; at all events, take a little more claret."

"If it were only ten pounds," observed I in desperation, for I felt that the subject was growing more delicate every moment, "I should be quite content even with that."

"My dear Mr. Drake, you shall have your ten pounds with all my heart."

I really felt quite ashamed at having begun to entertain a suspicion of Mr. Percival Swete—ashamed, too, at having demanded a sum of money so extremely small, that this millionaire had been unable, in mentioning it, to repress a contemptuous smile. I felt like a beggar to whom some great man was about to carelessly chuck a copper.

Mr. Swete made no objection, although he looked rather astonished when I pulled out of my pocket a stamped document, with which Mrs. Eleanor Blunt had furnished me, and requested (after filling in the space left blank for the amount with the words *Ten Pounds*) that he would subscribe his name to it. It was my assignment of the copyright of *Brigadoon* (to which, at Mr. Swete's instigation, I added a statement that the work was original) for that very insignificant sum; though future events compel me in justice to add that I honestly believe he would have consented to have made that ten pounds fifty. However, I must not anticipate. We parted upon the present occasion with many avowals of mutual esteem; and although I could not persuade my new acquaintance to visit Hershell Point, he promised faithfully that he should keep that invitation in mind.

It was not often, he assured me, that he commenced a professional connection with so strong a sense of personal interest as in my case. And under these happy auspices and the superintendence of Mr. Percival Swete's "people," *Brigadoon* was born.





CHAPTER XII.

BRIGADOON'S TROUBLES.

HERE is nothing, perhaps, more agreeable to a man's vanity than the revision of the proof-sheets of his first book. Print, like colour, flatters. Every idea, every description, every phrase appears in type to better advantage than in mere manuscript, though one's handwriting be ever so good and distinct. The reflection, too, that now, at last, these pregnant thoughts of ours are about to wing their way more or less throughout our favoured country, lighting the face of beauty with smiles, and drawing tears down the parchment cheeks of hardened attorneys, is a pleasant notion to entertain ; and even if a little exaggerated, it hurts nobody. In sober seriousness, it is a very important matter ; for the man who has once obtained publication

for what he has to say, has got all that any man has a right to expect, namely, a fair hearing. He has voluntarily put himself upon his trial, and the public are his judges. Those advocates for or against him, the reviewers, may say what they please (and some of them make themselves dreadfully unpleasant); but even though they may obtain a verdict from their readers, the jury, it is sure, sooner or later, to be set aside by the bench, if it has been given against evidence. As a general rule, however, the judges and the jury are agreed. We may have retained (although that, by-the-bye, is not very easy) the most eminent counsel for our defence, but the truth will come out in spite of him, and if we deserve it, we shall be condemned. Whether we are so or not, it is a most frightful thing for the gentleman in the dock to listen to the speeches for the prosecution. Never shall I forget the reading of those respectable periodicals which took unfavourable views of *Brigadoon*. If a disagreeable critique should befall me now, I should be able, to my own satisfaction at least, to lay my finger on the individual scoundrel who wrote it—actuated by the meanest of feelings, retaliation; but at that time, as I had certainly not a personal enemy in the world, with the exception of Sangaree Tannajee (whom I did not suspect of being a reviewer), I was debarred from ascribing these attacks to

private malice. The effect of this course of study was something similar to lying in an ant's nest without one's clothes, nay, without one's skin. The only mitigation of my sufferings was procured from the application of the favourable notices, which were unhappily not so numerous. Moreover, it was a balm to place the three volumes of *Brigadoon* before me, and contemplate them in silence. While engaged in this agreeable occupation one day, it suddenly struck me that that ten pounds owed to me by Mr. Percival Swete would be also a balm if I could get it. That enterprising publisher was perhaps of so delicate a disposition that he disliked to mention money-matters, but still it had been understood between us that that little sum was to be paid upon the birthday of *Brigadoon*.

I had a particular need for it—namely, to purchase a comfortable arm-chair for my uncle's bed-room ; for, notwithstanding his feeble health, he would not allow himself any luxury of this kind ; and I had looked forward in vain for some months to the pleasure of presenting it to him. So I wrote a few friendly lines to Mr. Swete, to remind him, in a graceful way, that doubtless amid the pressure of his various gigantic operations, this little matter of the ten pounds had been overlooked.

In course of post, I received a well-filled envelope, which I concluded without doubt contained the cheque

for the money, or perhaps two five-pound notes ; instead of this, it contained two letters, one on perfumed note-paper, from Mr. Percival Swete, and one on foolscap, and presenting a menacing aspect, from a stranger.

“MY DEAR MR. DRAKE,” ran the former—“A very distressing affair to me (because I am sure it will distress *you*) has just occurred : you have, it seems (no doubt undesignedly) appropriated what the law considers to be as much another man’s own property as his horse and gig—that is, the registered title of a literary work. Mr. Snow Skinner (a most worthy person, I am bound to say) has, it seems, already published a novel entitled *Brigadoon*, and he considers, with some justice, that you have been guilty of a piratical act. With less reason, he is obstinately convinced that you have *intentionally* traded upon the success of his production (of the existence of which, by-the-bye, I, like yourself, was profoundly ignorant), and he breathes slaughter and vengeance against you. What he threatens, as you observe, is an injunction in Chancery ; a process which, if obtained, will not only prevent my selling another copy of your work, but will compel me to account to him for every copy sold. This, of course, is not my affair at all, since I hold a statement in your own hand that your work is *in all respects* original ; but it

annoys me upon your account exceedingly—not to mention that it is most disagreeable for a person of my position to be mixed up with the least suspicion of anything discreditable. My advice to you is, to compound the matter with all speed, since one never knows where law expenses will end. I am bound to say that the sum which Mr. Snow Skinner names as a discharge of the whole matter, and which will reinstate *Brigadoon* in the position of an original work as much as if this had never occurred, seems to me by no means unreasonable.—The weather is abominable in London, and I envy you the sea breezes and clear air of Hershell Point above all things ; but, alas, I am tied here by a variety of immense transactions, and cannot promise myself a holiday for months to come.—Always yours most faithfully, my dear Mr. Drake, PERCIVAL SWETE.”

I felt like one in a nightmare as I took up the second letter, and I had to read its contents twice over before I could bring my mind to bear upon it. It set forth in legal language the charge of literary piracy which Mr. Swete had described, and announced that the application for an injunction would at once be made to Chancery, unless a compensation should be offered by the offender of not less than two hundred and fifty pounds.

In my ignorance of all legal affairs, it seemed to me as if a criminal prosecution was impending, and that shame as well as something like ruin awaited me ; for as to this “by no means unreasonable” demand of two hundred and fifty pounds, how was it possible for me to get it paid, unless I should persuade this Mr. Snow Skinner to accept my literary services for life as a discharge of the obligation, which was far from likely, judging from the assets which my talents had hitherto realised. Mr. Percival Swete, by-the-bye, had made no mention of that miserable ten pounds upon the *per contra* side of the account ; but this was scarcely to be wondered at. Doubtless, Mr. Snow Skinner would impound that little sum, to begin with, before consigning me to a debtors’ jail ; for I would certainly go to jail, rather than permit my uncle to pay this money out of his already crippled resources. I did not dare, freighted with this evil news, to meet his kind worn face, but snatched up my hat, and set off at a sharp run towards Sandiford, with the intention of consulting Mrs. Blunt, who, I now remembered, had always been opposed to my having any business connection with Mr. Percival Swete. A suspicion of that agreeable gentleman’s probity had, for the first time, been awakened in my own trustful bosom.

As I flew up the second zigzag, I met Rosa Glendell

descending it. There was no possibility of my avoiding her, or I would have done so. She had never seen me otherwise than radiant with the hope which she herself inspired, and I was afraid that I should not now be able to hide my misery. "My dear Marmy," cried she with agitation, "what *has* happened?"

"Nothing at all," said I; "I was only starting for Seaview Cottage. I have had a letter about *Brigadoon*; it is no great matter, but I wanted Mrs. Blunt to advise me."

"How thankful I am, Marmy. I thought, from your running out of the house at that speed—for I have watched you all the way—that something my father once told me about your dear uncle— But there, it's not so; and yet you look so wild, Marmy, yes, and under that forced smile so sad. Is that letter really of no consequence?—only one of those detestable reviews which you persist in reading, although you know the bad effect they have upon you?"

"It's not a review, Rosa—it's something on business, which you would not understand;" and I strove to pass by her on my way.

But her light touch was on my arm, and her low sweet voice—a charm that I could not resist—whispered reproachfully: "Marmy!"

"Well, dear?" said I.

"It is not well, Marmy, to evade me thus, when trouble is on your mind. If I cannot understand the nature of this misfortune, I at least can sympathise with it. When you have had good news, you have always shared it with me; and now that you have a sorrow, am I not worthy to bear half the burden? If not, truly you did right to absolve me from my promise to marry you, for you must have judged I would make but a fair-weather wife indeed."

"Dearest Rosa," said I, "I desired to save you from the knowledge of this trouble as long as I could; but you shall read these letters, since you wish it;" and I gave them into her hand.

It did not tremble as mine had done when she had read them; and in place of being cast down, a bright light shone in her eyes, an assuring smile sat on her lips. "It is only two hundred and fifty pounds at most, then, that we have to pay."

"Only two hundred and fifty pounds!" rejoined I bitterly. "You might as well say only two thousand five hundred, Rosa; my uncle could almost as easily pay one sum as the other; and when I come to tell him——"

"Which you must never do," interrupted Rosa

earnestly. “Bad news, my father says, might kill him on the spot, Marmy ; or at least,” added she, perceiving the agitation into which her words had thrown me, “would do him grievous harm. There is, it seems, some complication in his malady—the heart is affected as well as the lungs ; though, if nothing sudden or disastrous should occur, he may yet be spared to us for many years.”

“Oh Rosa, Rosa,” cried I reproachfully, “why have you, you who talk of sharing sorrows, kept this from *me?*”

“Because it was my father’s secret, Marmy, and not my own. If it had been better you should know it, he would have told you himself. It was a doctor’s matter, with which I dared not meddle. But how glad and thankful I am that in your ignorance you did not inform your uncle of this claim, but resolved to consult Mrs. Blunt first—although, you naughty boy, you ought to have thought first of me.”

“Alas, dear,” said I, “it is but of little consequence ; my uncle must needs know it sooner or later, for he will have to find the money.”

“He will have to do nothing of the kind, Marmy,” answered Rosa decisively, “for I’ll lend it you myself.—What ! you think I have not got it ? But I beg to say I

have, Sir. If you have fallen in love with a young person without due enquiry into her circumstances, that shows how imprudent you are, although it is true it acquits you of having mercenary views. You have chanced unaware, Sir, upon an heiress" (and I am sure if she had been a real one she could not have looked more pleased.) "I have three hundred pounds or so, all my own, which I became possessed of on my eighteenth birthday. An admirable godmother, of whom, however, I have not the slightest recollection, left me one hundred and fifty pounds when I was an infant in arms, to accumulate. And it has accumulated, dear Marmy, and oh ! I am so glad to—to—have the opportunity of becoming your creditor. I am quite sure papa will consent, and then your dear good uncle need never know anything about the matter. You see it will be quite a business transaction," continued she with gravity, "and I shall only invest the money in you, as it were, and exact interest at quarter days, or whatever they are called."

I dare say it was wrong, but I was a child of impulse and I could not prevent myself from clasping this charming creditor to my heart, and giving her a kiss, by way of interest in advance.

"That will do, Marmy," said Rosa, disengaging herself demurely ; "and I only forgive you, Sir, because I con-

clude that such is your way of sealing a bargain, although I doubt whether it's usual in the City."

"No, my dearest Rosa," said I gravely ; "it is *not* a bargain ; I could not possibly take your money, although I love you more than ever." She looked so pained and grieved, that instead of thanking her, as she seemed afraid I was about to do, I added smiling : "Oh yes, a great deal more, now that I know you are an heiress. But what will Mrs. Blunt say, when she comes to hear that I begin to be independent, and to show myself capable of maintaining a wife, as well as myself, by borrowing money of *you*?"

"That is so like an Englishman," said Rosa scornfully ; and it was the first time and the last that I ever knew her voice to have a bitter tone. "You are so proud, that you would die sooner than incur an obligation (as you call it, I suppose) which involves pounds, shillings, and pence, from a woman. I tell you that I see neither nobility nor spirit in such conduct, Marmy, but only a cowardly fear of your Mrs. Grundy."

"That is not spoken like yourself, dear Rosa," said I tenderly ; "though it's true I do fear Mrs. Grundy in a matter like this, wherein you are concerned as well as I."

"And do you not fear to risk the life of your uncle ? If you have no love for me, you will have some consider-

ation for him, I conclude.—There, you see I am right, Marmy. I was only angry because I could not persuade you : you forgive me, don't you ? ”

“ Yes, I forgive you, dearest ; but I must take time to think about this, and must ask advice from those who are wiser, who are not all mere goodness, where money is concerned, as you are ; ” and so, having kissed away my Rosa’s tears, and comforted her all I could, I went upon my way to Sandiford.

Mrs. Blunt received the terrible intelligence I had to give her with astonishment, tempered by philosophy.

“ I thought I had lived too long in the world, my dear, to be surprised at anything ; but really your friend, Mr. Percival Swete, is a scoundrel without a parallel.”

“ You think, then, the claim which he recommends me to satisfy is not altogether a *bonâ-fide* one ? ”

“ I am perfectly certain, Marmy, that it is a gigantic swindle ; but the question is, how far the law encourages it. I have no doubt there is some trashy book in existence of the same name as your novel, and I have a shrewd suspicion that that very circumstance was what made Mr. Swete so anxious to publish *Brigadoon* for you. He had this scheme of extortion in his mind from the first moment you offered him your novel. He came down to Daisyport, and gave you that nice little dinner

with the object of finding out certain matters which he could not discover by letter : whether you were as young and inexperienced as you represented yourself to be, and particularly whether you, or rather your friends, had any money. He satisfied himself on the first point easily enough, and your uncle's invitation perhaps made him believe that he was a person of substance. Doubtless, too, you did not give him to understand that the ex-maharajah was otherwise than a country gentleman living on his own estate."

I coloured to the roots of my hair, for I certainly remembered to have made the best of Hershell Point (as some set-off against his "people" and the gigantic character of his "operations"), when speaking of that residence to Mr. Percival Swete.

"Yes," continued the old lady thoughtfully, "the whole affair is what these thieves would call in their own dialect 'a plant.' Of course there are numberless rouqueries in literature, as in everything else, Marmy, but to Mr. Swete belongs the credit of having invented a new one. It did puzzle me a good deal to hear of his readiness to sign that agreement, but now it's all explained. He might have promised to pay you a hundred pounds quite safely, since he had only to add it to this present claim to recoup himself."

“Such dishonesty cannot surely prosper,” said I, driven by the thought of this perfidy to platitude and proverb. “I should not be the least surprised to hear some day of his being bankrupt.”

“No more should I,” observed Mrs. Blunt drily: “it would not be the first time nor the second that Mr. Swete has experienced that calamity. But, upon my life, it is infamous,” cried the old lady indignantly, “to trade upon the innocence of a lad like this; and if my Mr. Moulden can give him a rap over the knuckles, he shall have it.”

“My Mr. Moulden” was one of those pet lawyers which (as well as a pet doctor) every literary person of eminence always possesses, and Mrs. Eleanor Blunt had the utmost confidence in his sagacity and discretion. She wrote to him, accordingly, by that day’s post; and bade me take no steps at present (which was easy enough), and not to trouble myself in the mean time about the matter—which was very difficult. Under these circumstances, and partly, perhaps, because of that pride of which Rosa had accused me, I made no mention of my darling’s offer to give up her little all to feed the maw of that worthy man, Mr. Snow Skinner.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE RETREAT IS SOUNDED.

AFTER an interval of ten days, which seemed to me as many weeks, the admirable Mr. Moulden exhibited another proof of his infallibility by the following letter :

MY DEAR MRS. BLUNT,—I have got to the root of the matter of the two *Brigadoons* at last, although in no case should I have advised your protégée to give one six-pence in compensation for imaginary damage. It is quite true that Mr. Snow Skinner did once favour the world with a work of fiction bearing the title in question. But if Mr. Percival Swete was not aware of the fact previous to his little business transaction with Mr. Drake, it showed (in so genial and warm-hearted a gentleman) a very re-

markable want of interest in the affairs of his relatives—*for Mr. Snow Skinner is Mr. Swete's half-brother.* As the latter and I happened to be alone when I had the pleasure of reminding him of this circumstance (the knowledge of which it caused me infinite trouble to obtain), I treated myself to a very free expression of opinion upon the whole affair. Of course he saw that the game was up at once ; but I am bound to say that a more imperturbable and philosophic vagabond was never beheld. The only thing that moved him was my imperative demand for that ten pounds (which I have the pleasure of enclosing) that he promised to pay for the copyright. It was like drawing a badger. I doubt whether he ever paid anybody any money before. He excused himself upon a variety of grounds, one of which was, that Mr. Drake had solicited him most urgently to become his publisher. “He *courted* me, Mr. Moulden, I do assure you.”—“Well, Sir, and if you don't pay,” replied I, “he will now County Court you ;” which I think was rather a neat reply. By means of that retort, to speak chemically, I distilled the gold.—Yours always, dear Mrs. Blunt, with affectionate admiration,

GEOFFREY MOULDEN.

The receipt of this letter put us all in the highest spirits, and its contents enabled me to purchase the long-wished

for arm-chair for my dear uncle. Indeed, it was but too plain that he needed every comfort, although he would not admit that there was much the matter with him. The ex-maharajah still looked the grand old soldier; but it was only to outward seeming: he was like a stately castle, the walls of which are undermined, and might topple to the ground at the least shock. From being always with him, we did not, however, perceive any particular cause for alarm; and he did his best to prevent our doing so. He disliked to see the least evidence of trouble on his own account, and, indeed, resented it, except in Rosa's case. It was astonishing how cheerful and animated he became under her influence, and how he lost his old habit of taciturnity. Many a vivid scene of Eastern adventure, which would else have lain for ever locked up in his memory, did the young girl evoke; only, as before, he never spoke of the part which Tannajee had played herein, and but very rarely and incidentally of the Begum of Bundelbad. I think, since Rosa's advent, he became embarrassed when alluding to his relations with that august princess, although we were very curious to hear of them. Mr. Glendell, however, on one occasion — and I shall never forget that evening, for it was the very last our little company ever passed together—ventured to enquire respecting the Begum's views upon religious matters.

“The religion of the state,” replied the ex-maharajah, avoiding this home-question, “was unhappily idolatry; but the Bundelbadians did not grow their own gods—they imported them from China. I have got an invoice somewhere of a consignment of deities from Canton;” and my uncle, who coloured a little, as if ashamed of this transaction, began fumbling some papers in a drawer. “You see, Glendell, I was a stranger in the country, and had no public influence whatever; it was my duty, when treasurer to Her Majesty’s household, to docket all the bills, and this invoice passed through my hands as a matter of business. I thought I had it somewhere here; but I dare say it has been used for lighting cheroots.”

“But what is that printed document I see, like what is stuck on tea-chests?” urged Mr. Glendell.

“Oh, that is merely the advertisement of our Canton idol-maker. I cut it out of the Chinese newspaper, at Her Highness’s request, in case we should forget his address;” and my uncle carelessly closed the drawer, and sat down.

“Could you read Chinese, then, dear Mr. Braydon?” enquired Rosa.

“No, my dear young lady.”

“Then what was the use of your keeping the advertisement?”

"Well, the fact is, there is a translation appended in English."

"I should very much like to hear it," said Rosa hesitatingly.

"There is no harm in your doing so," said my uncle: "it is a curious trade-document, that is all.—Read it, Marmy."

And I read it accordingly.

"I, Achen Tea Chinchen, a lineal descendant of Coupe Boi Roche Chinchen, the celebrated sculptor and carver in wood, who, through his unremitting studies to promote rational religious worship, has been honoured with the commands of emperors, kings, and rajahs of the East, and supplied them with superior idols for public and domestic worship, now humbly offer my services in the same theological line; having travelled at a vast expense, and perfected myself in anatomy, and in copying the most graceful attitudes of the human figure under Nollekens and Bacon. A. T. C. is ready to execute to order idols from twelve feet high, well proportioned, down to the size of a marmoset monkey, or the most hideous monster that can be supposed to inspire awe and reverence for religion. My charges are moderate: For an Orang-outang, three feet high, 700 dollars; ditto, rampant, 800; a Sphinx, 400; a Bull with hump and

horns, 650; and an Ass in a braying attitude, 850. The most durable materials—granite, brass, and copper—will be used. Perishable wood shall never disgrace a deity made by my hands. Posterity may see the objects of their fathers' devotion unsullied by the inclemencies of the seasons, the embraces of the pious, or their tears. Small idols for domestic worship, or made into portable compass for pilgrims. Any order post-paid, and accompanied by a drawing or description of the idol, will be promptly attended to; provided that one-half of the expense shall be first paid, and the remainder secured by any respectable House in Canton."

What merry laughs we had over Mr. Chinchen's circular! How reluctantly was the ex-maharajah induced, by the doctor's wiles and Rosa's smiles, to narrate the wonders of Bundelbad; and how charmed we were with them. Our guests did not take their departure till hours which, considering what "the Point" hours usually were, might be called "small:" they left us about half-past ten o'clock.

I was gaily congratulating my uncle upon his talents as a *raconteur*, and on his improved looks, when I saw him, upon a sudden, turn quite white—whiter than I should have thought it possible for his bronzed cheeks to look—and put his hand to his side, as if in pain. "It is nothing," said he, with a smile that was meant to reassure

me ; "a mere passing faintness, that is all." He would not hear of my running out to fetch back Mr. Glendell ; nor would he retire to bed. "Make up the fire a little, and let us talk, Marmy."

"My dear uncle," urged I, "this is not right ; you have had talking enough and to spare for to-night. Why, in all my life, I have scarcely heard so much from you of your Indian experiences as within the last few hours."

"Nevertheless, Marmy, I must say a few words more.—Is Tannajee gone to bed?"

I went softly to the Hindu's chamber, and found him snoring heavily. Perhaps he was *dreaming* of sitting up for his master beyond the usual hour, but he certainly never *did* it. He was as useless in the house as any log ; but ever since that interview between us in the study, he had ceased to be insolent in his manner. It was indeed observed on all sides what an improvement had taken place in him ; and on that slight ground—such is the advantage of habitual ill-humour and misconduct—he was even quite in favour with the cook.

"My dear lad," began my uncle gravely, "if I were to die this night, the only regret I should have would be in leaving you so ill provided for."

"That would be *my* least cause of regret, uncle."

"I do believe you, Marmy. And I, on my part, love

you so that I do not repent of my selfishness in having kept you near me, though you might have done much better for yourself away from home."

"Your selfishness, uncle?" I took up his large brown hand, which was far thinner than it used to be, and reverently kissed it. Young as I was, and in love with life, I would have sacrificed my own existence to have eked out his, and, thank Heaven, he knew it.

"I have had a happy time here at the Point, Marmy, thanks to you; happier than ever I expected; more peaceful than I ever deserved. Yes, yes; you do not know what my life has been. I am thankful to think you have no idea of such things. But God is merciful. If He chastens us here, it is only for our good hereafter." And again he pressed his fingers to his side.

I was alarmed by this action; but much more so by his words and manner, which were such as I had never known him use before.

He went on to speak of death and judgment in words I shall not of course reproduce here. It was plain to me that if he had never talked of such matters before, he had long had them on his mind. He spoke with reverence and humility. "I hope," said he smiling, "that I shall not be weighed against men like good Mr. Glendell, but that allowances will be made for an old soldier. But

enough of myself, Marmy. If I were to die to-night," repeated he, "there are but fifty pounds in the world for you to keep house upon. In trying to better ourselves of late, I have made matters much worse. I drew the last shilling I had at the bank out yesterday; and it all lies in my desk, with that Packet you wot of. When you have read its contents, you will take counsel of your own mind (for my word is pledged for you, Marmy, to conceal the matter) as to whether you wish to stay at the Point, where your great attraction lies—— Oh yes, dear lad, I know all about that, and I love her as though she were my own child. Dear, dear Rosa!" And to my wonder, or, I may say awe, I saw the large tears rolling down my uncle's cheeks. "To have seen you two made one, Marmy, would have been too great a joy for such as I have been to witness; but perhaps, in time, it may be so. Yet do not risk her happiness by wedding on mere Expectations: you will know what I mean when the time comes. Fifty pounds, as I was saying, is all that is now left from the sale of my Indian jewels; but the Point and the ground about it, if you choose to dispose of them, will fetch some twelve hundred pounds; or you can raise a part of that sum on mortgage, and keep yourself here by your pen. It is best to trust to yourself, and calculate on no contingencies. Still, as you will have

learned by the time I speak of, you may be one day a rich man. You will then remember the *poor*."

My uncle's charity, considering his circumstances, was boundless ; and every aged woman and sick child in the village blessed his footfall when they heard it at their doors. The parson of the parish, of which our hamlet was but an outlying district, with no church, used to call him the curate of Hershell.

"I will endeavour, uncle, all I can," returned I, "to imitate your example."

"No, no, Marmy ; not mine, but Rosa's. She is always good and wise. It is in order that you may secure her for a helpmate that I wish, most of all, that you may inherit what I have missed.—Listen, Marmy. Is the door fast ?—I am not going to divulge what I have promised to conceal, but I may tell you this much : your future prosperity depends upon the Hindu. He is a bad man ; and he does not like you, Marmy. Still, you will have a hold upon him. He must never leave your service. If he does so, pursue him to the ends of the earth ; and recover him, Dead or Alive. Yes, *Dead or Alive*. The reason will have been explained to you in that writing after my death ; but in the meantime, if I were to become ill and helpless, look to this. Tannajee has been on his good behaviour lately, and that is a bad sign. I could not run after him now

across the downs," said my uncle, with a sad smile, "and bring him back by the scruff of his neck."

"I, however, can do so," observed I with significance.

"Yes, I think he's somewhat afraid of you now, Marmy ; and that is no bad thing.—But there is another danger, to which you, who are yourself in love, ought not to have been blind : Tannajee is courting Martha."

Ill as my uncle was, I was astonished at the gravity with which he made this announcement. For myself, I could not help laughing outright. True, I had observed that Martha and the Hindu had of late been very gracious towards one another : but I thought I knew the cause. "Why, until within these last few months, my dear uncle," reasoned I, "those two have been like cat and dog. Why, he's almost a black man, and besides, our cook is quite an old woman !"

"That's the danger," said my uncle with seriousness ; and I am quite sure that his mind was then reverting to the princess who even to so late a period of life had evinced her partiality to Europeans. "When a woman gets to her age, she is not particular about the colour of her husband."

Since our prosperity depends upon Tannajee, thought I, we are in a manner his heirs, and supposing he married Martha, and had offspring, that would invalidate our claims.

But I was not at all apprehensive of this danger, and perhaps the idea of it awoke a smile.

“It is no jesting matter this, Marmy,” continued my uncle earnestly, “as you will understand some day. But this marriage must not be. Indeed, Tannajee has solemnly promised to remain a bachelor.”

“Then make yourself quite easy, my dear uncle,” replied I with confidence, remembering the persuasive powers of my pistol. “The Hindu shall keep his word, you may take mine for that.”

“You must not treat him ill, Marmy,” said my uncle in low faint tones; “and remember, you must not be impatient for a dead man’s shoes. As for me, my sand has well nigh run out. Glendell knows it, my dear lad; and *I* know it.”

“You are tired, dear uncle,” said I; “you have exerted yourself much this evening, and it is long past your usual bedtime.”

“No: no bed for me to-night. I could not lie down if I would.” He seized my hand, and gripped it with a force I could not have supposed him to possess. His brow was damp; his face wore a look of mortal agony.

“For Heaven’s sake, uncle, let me send for Mr. Glendell. I am certain you are very ill.”

"Nay, Marmy ; I am past doctors' skill, and I wish to be with you alone—quite alone."

As I looked up swiftly at those tender words, I saw something more than my uncle's pallid face—I saw over his shoulder, at the half-opened parlour-door, a pair of gleaming eyes. They were gone in a moment, but I felt assured they had been there ; that for some time, long or short, we had not been quite alone, but had had Tannajee for our watcher, and perhaps our audience.

"Bring me that nice arm-chair, Marmy," whispered my uncle feebly—"the one you gave me.—Bought with his first book, dear lad, dear lad ; Heaven bless him !"

Before I could gently unloose his fingers from their hold on mine, he thought I had already left the room ; his brain was plainly wandering ; the noble ship was breaking up before my eyes. Presently, with some disconnected words of prayer, he sank into a doze, and then I went out on tiptoe, and softly fetched the chair. As I passed by Tannajee's room, I noticed his door was ajar, so I closed it, and in order to stop further eaves-dropping, turned the key, which happened to be on the outside. Brief as was the period of my absence, it seemed to me that my uncle's looks had already changed for the worse ; but at the slight noise I was obliged to make, he opened his eyes, and smiled.

"I thought the bugle had sounded, Marmy, and that I had obeyed it," whispered he. "It is time for the retreat. The battle of life is quite over with me." And indeed it seemed to be. Yet, with my help, he managed to raise himself and shift his limbs to the arm-chair. A smile of mingled love and gratitude then played upon his features for an instant, and as his head fell slowly back, I heard him softly murmur "Marmy."

That was Uncle Theo's last word.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE HINDU FLIES.

HADE never stood in the presence of death before, but my awe was nothing in comparison to my grief, which broke forth with such vehemence that it aroused both the maid-servants, whose terrified shrieks, when they saw what had happened, were shocking to hear. But their sorrow was at least genuine, and I was glad to think that I had made the Hindu secure—whose hypocritic face would have been far more unwelcome to me than their cries. After a while—I know not who fetched him—Mr. Glendell arrived, and ordered all things duly. He was sincerely grieved, though he did not show his sorrow in our fashion; use had blunted but not destroyed his sympathies. “I always predicted that your poor uncle would go off in this way,” said he, not without

a touch of professional triumph ; then added reverently : “ He was a great-hearted man, my lad, and leaves not his like behind him, so far as I know.”

When they had laid Uncle Theo on his bed, they left me alone with him, kneeling beside him, and sobbing as though my heart would break, I know not for how long. I remembered nothing ; I was aware of nothing, except that my father, brother, friend, was lying there dead, until a gentle hand was laid upon my shoulder, and a voice as dear as that which was hushed for ever whispered to me that I was not left utterly alone and unfriended even yet.

It was Rosa, whom her father had sent at dawn to stanch the grief for which he had no other remedy, and mingling her tears with mine, wise homœopathist, she thereby healed me. In that dread presence, I told her how those dumb lips had spoken of her last, and what those fast-closed eyes had longed in vain to see. Not with any intent, Heaven knows, to bind her heart to mine, which was already one with it ! I was thinking of him only.

While we yet spoke of this, and when it was still very early, Mr. Glendell came and signed to us to follow him into the parlour. “ Marmy,” said he earnestly, “ there has been enough of grief. It is time to think of the wishes of the dead.”

"I think of nothing else," said I, with my hand still fast in Rosa's.

"But you must bestir yourself also. Did not your uncle tell you to keep the Hindu in your service? Where is Tannajee?"

"I locked him in his room last night."

"You locked his door, but he was not within. He was seen by the servants in the passage at the time your uncle died. He only waited for his death, I fear, to leave your roof."

I started up and ran into the study. The window was wide open, and it was but a few feet from the ground. I flew to my uncle's desk, and there lay the canvas bag in which he used to keep his money—empty. The gold was gone. I touched the little spring, and out flew the drawer; but that was empty also. Mr. Glendell and Rosa had followed me into the room, and at once perceived that some new calamity had occurred.

"The scoundrel has robbed you, I dare say?" observed the former drily.

"He has taken fifty-pounds," said I; but that is nothing. He has stolen the packet likewise that contains the 'secret.'"

"The devil he has!" exclaimed the doctor excitedly. "At all events, it is well he took the money, for now we

have the law upon our side. You must at once get a warrant for his apprehension, my lad.—Don't be cast down: we'll have him yet, depend upon it, Marmy: he can't elude folks' observation any more than an escaped orang-outang. Now we see how excellent are the ways of nature, and why it is he was made so ugly!"

Mr. Glendell spoke thus cheerfully perhaps, because he read in my looks discouragement or despair; but if so he was never more mistaken in his life. He should have seen in them only a fixed resolve. The words of the ex-maharajah seemed once more to fall upon my ears with solemn distinctness: "Your future prosperity depends upon the Hindu; he must never leave your service. If he does so, pursue him to the ends of the earth."

I was but resolving within myself that henceforth I would have no other mission in life, no other hopes nor fears, would know no rest, nor respite, nor enjoyment, until I had obeyed my uncle's mandate, and laid my hand upon the Hindu "Dead or Alive."



CHAPTER XV.

ON HERSELL REEF.

WAS it well for me to leave to others, not his kin, the task of following my beloved benefactor to the grave? Or was it well to neglect his last commands during that precious time in which alone I might be able to obey them? The delay of even a single day might offer to the Hindu an opportunity for flight, which would place him beyond the reach of my outstretched arms for ever. On the other hand, to quit that roof, which had been my happy home so long, while its late master yet lay beneath it, was most abhorrent to my feelings. Mr. Glendell, as I expected, took the practical view of the matter.

“ If your poor uncle were dying, Marmy, your presence, even if you could do him no good, would be a comfort to

him ; and I would not have had you deprive him of it, for any amount of material profit ; but since he is dead, it seems to me you can do no better service to him than that of carrying out his express injunctions."

On the whole, my own judgment tallied with this verdict ; but the thought that it was no longer my uncle who was interested in the recovery of the Hindu, but myself alone —that the pursuit on which I was about to enter had my own advantage for its end, held me still irresolute. I turned enquiringly where I knew worldly prudence would have no grain of weight if loving duty were indeed in the opposite scale—to Rosa.

"It is a question for yourself alone to answer, Marmy," said she quietly, "and not for us. If you are secretly aware that the idea of personal profit chiefly actuates you to leave him yonder"—and she pointed to the chamber of death—"rather than his own mandate, then I should bid you stay, for the sense of such a misdeed might be a ghost to haunt you, such as no wordly prosperity could ever lay."

"I am quite conscience clear," said I earnestly, "in that matter, Rosa. But to leave him thus——"

"He is not here, Marmy—he is in heaven," answered the young girl softly. "The empty house of clay which he has quitted will, you may trust my father, have due

reverence, even though you do not watch beside it ; and when it is borne to the grave, it shall not lack at least two true mourners."

I took her hand, and pressed it fondly. "I will go, Rosa : that is the best and wisest course. I know not how long I may be away"—I was going to say "from home," but the word stuck in my throat ; "the Point" seemed home no longer, now that it had lost its master. "I know not whither this search of mine may carry me—perhaps across the seas. But I will find this man, if he is above ground ; so help me Heaven!"

"Amen !" said the little doctor cheerily. "Folks may say that colour is but a matter of fancy, but I, for my part, would never knuckle under to a black man, nor yet to a white-brown. Trust to me and Rosa for having all things as you would wish them to be at Hershell ; and be off at once. There is every reason for haste. I have found out from Martha, who is outrageous against the Hindu for taking himself off at such a time, that he has spoken to her of late about returning to India. There is a ship, I know, about to start from Daisyport for Calcutta, and I should not wonder if he tried to get a passage in her. You must catch him where the warrant can run, which, for all I know, it cannot do upon the high-seas."

"If I catch Sangaree Tannajee," said I between my teeth, "I'll answer for it I'll bring him back, warrant or no warrant. I shall take one of those persuaders with me which I have already found so influential with this scoundrel."

"That's not right," interposed Rosa firmly. "You must only do what the law empowers you to do. Suppose this man is obstinate, and you are equally determined? Oh, pray, pray, Marmy, for my sake, do not take your pistols."

"Rosa is right," said the doctor reflectively: "you might get in a passion with the scoundrel."

"I shall not do that," said I savagely; "I am past passion."

"Dear Marmy," urged Rosa solemnly, "is it possible you can persuade yourself you are obeying your dead uncle's wishes in acting as you propose? Would *he*, who has borne with this poor wretch so patiently for years, and who, we almost may say, in preserving his life, has just lost his own, approve of such a course of conduct as you are now contemplating? Come; give up this mere longing for revenge, which belies your nature, Marmy, and keep within the pale of right. Who are you, even if you could do so with impunity, that you should thus play the part of a despot, of a tyrant, and towards so despicable an object?"

"I was wrong, dear Rosa," said I ruefully ; "and you shall keep my pistols for me—although I did but intend to frighten the rascal with an empty barrel."

But in reality I knew not what I had intended to do, and even now, under the influence of my darling's gentle sway, I was scarcely master of myself. The awful event of the last night had of course unhinged me. It was the first time in my life I had ever been thrown upon my own resources. The simple commonplaces of home-life, and the quiet pursuits of literature, were about to be suddenly exchanged for—I knew not what poverty, toil and failure ; or perhaps for sudden affluence, the very source of which, at present hidden from me, I was as eager to discover as any lad in the Arabian tales, thwarted by some malignant Jin.

And I was not afraid of my Jin ; I longed to meet with him, that I might clutch him by the throat, and bid him disgorge that secret, the mystery of which seemed to possess me wholly, now that it had become by inheritance mine. Perhaps I should not soon have disentangled myself from this web of thought, had not Mr. Glendell swept it away from me with : "The gig and mare are at the door, Marmy ; and my man shall drive you first to the nearest magistrate, to get the warrant ; and then on to Daisypore."

“Thanks, thanks,” cried I, grasping the doctor’s hand.
—“Good-bye, dear Rosa.”

Then I had one more “good-bye” to say to one who could not return it. I took my last look at that dear face, which had always worn a smile for me (and wore it yet), and kissed its cold white lips ; and hurried into the little hall.

“Here is money, Marmy,” said Mr. Glendell, putting in my hand a well filled purse, “without which the mare cannot be made to go : we will square accounts at another time.”

I had actually been about to start without a single sixpence.

“Master Marmy, Master Marmy, you’ve forgotten your luggage,” cried Martha, running out with a carpet-bag, into which, by Rosa’s orders, she had put a few things, as I climbed into the gig. “And here’s some of your poor uncle’s wraps, as he’ll never want more ; for you’ll find it main cold upon the downs.”

And it *was* cold. The north-east wind blew upon the high and open down-land with a force that the game little mare could scarcely make head against, and the view to seaward showed a mass of tumbling foam. But the sharp coolness was pleasant to my fevered brow, and lightened my laden brain. For the first time since the previous

night, I began to think clearly. The visit to the magistrate also did me good. His cut-and-dried phrases of condolence, his matter-of-fact questions, and even his superfluous advice, all helped to bring me to myself; and long before we had reached our destination, I had formed a definite plan. We enquired of all whom we met respecting the runaway, but could glean nothing; indeed, he had had so many hours' start of us that this was hardly to be expected. But my first question at the inn, where we put up—the same at which I had dined with the fascinating Mr. Swete—was concerning the ship of which I had heard as about to leave the port for India. The people of the hotel exhibited the usual ignorance of their class respecting anything not immediately connected with their own calling; “they really could not say;” but there was a local paper in the coffee-room, which would doubtless contain the shipping intelligence of the place. This periodical was, however, mislaid. I hurried to the docks, and made my enquiries at head-quarters. The *Star of the West* had sailed that morning for Calcutta. It was to have started the day before, but the weather had been too tempestuous. True, it was stormy enough to-day; but the wind had changed, which before had been directly adverse to the ship's course.

“Had a passenger—a Hindu—joined the vessel?”

enquired I, “at the very last moment?” My limbs trembled as I asked this question, and I could hear the beating of my own heart. I should have thought it would have been easy for the most unobservant to perceive that my business was of the last importance; but the clerk only settled down to his work with a surly: “How should I know? This is not the passenger department.”

I could have leaped across the counter and strangled him; but I managed to ask with civility where the passenger department was. “Next dock,” answered the man with irritation. This Jack in office could, as I subsequently learned, have answered my question readily enough, but he would not compromise his dignity. The passenger department was an inferior branch of the company’s offices. What unnecessary suspense and pain does man in his brutal egotism inflict upon his fellow-creatures! The booking-clerk was, on the other hand, a communicative young fellow enough.—“Yes indeed: a fat Hindu had gone on board the ship not an hour before she set sail. A pretty voyage he was likely to make of it. He looked sea-sick before he started.—When would another vessel sail for the same destination?—Oh, immediately. The consort of the *Star of the West* would start that day fortnight.—Couldn’t say which was the fastest: all the Company’s ships were fast ones—clippers. Didn’t know as to

the state of sailing of other companies' vessels ; but he knew one thing—that none of them would catch the *Star*. She had a great treasure—as doubtless I had heard—on board : fifty thousand pounds in gold, consigned to —."

Very wretched and sick at heart, I left the man, still dilating upon the wealth and importance of the mercantile firm with which he was officially connected, and went back to the inn. It was almost my first acquaintance with the world outside Hershell Point, and how selfish all folks seemed ! I sat down at a table in the huge coffee-room, and rested my head on my hands, thinking how vastly I had underrated the difficulties of the pursuit in which I was engaged. So long as the Hindu had remained in England, I should have felt certain, sooner or later, of laying hands upon him. His colour and speech would have isolated him from others, and left an easy trace. But thus to have placed the seas between us at the outset, was to have escaped me at once. I had not really faced the possibility of such a thing, and the stroke of good-fortune which had befallen him in this unexpected manner fairly paralysed me. It had been all very well to vow to follow him to the ends of the earth, but how was I to find him in the wide waste of India.

" You seem sad, Mr. Marmaduke Drake," said a quiet voice close to my ear. It was a bantering voice, and I

was not in the humour for banter. I looked up angrily, and perceived that a stranger had seated himself at the next table—a stout hale man, who had apparently taken a great deal of port wine in his time, and was taking some now with his luncheon. He was dressed neatly in black, with a white tie, and yet he did not look like a clergyman.

“Sir,” said I coldly, “I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance.”

“Yes, you have,” replied he carelessly. “You have had more—I have done business for you, and never charged you for it—a most unprofessional proceeding. My name’s Geoffrey Moulden.”

I rose up at once and warmly shook his hand. “Excuse my ill manners, Sir,” said I. “I know no one to whom it more behoves me to be courteous. But of course I did not know you. How came you to know me?”

“The landlady told me who you were. I am going down to spend a day or two with Mrs. Blunt at Sandiford; and when I was ordering my trap, she said there was a young gentleman here from those parts. You seem in trouble again, my friend. You have had no more business transactions with Mr. Percival Swete, I trust?”

“No, indeed, Sir. I am amateur thief-catching just

now, and my man has just escaped ; ” and I told him how the Hindu had carried off the money the previous night, and was now safe on board the *Star of the West*.

“ Well, fifty pounds are not worth taking a voyage to India for,” observed Mr. Moulden. “ There is nothing for it but to go home again. Can I not take you some miles in my conveyance ? ”

I hesitated, unwilling to return home so soon with nothing accomplished. Yet, what could I do ? The gig had already gone back, and Mr. Moulden’s offer was not reasonably to be refused.

“ Come, Mr. Drake,” urged he cheerfully ; “ it would really be a kindness to me, for besides the advantage of your company, the more ballast we have the better, for this wind seems strong enough to put anything on four wheels topsy-turvy.”

The wind had indeed risen, till it was well-nigh a hurricane. Even where we were, in comparative shelter, its effects were visible enough : the leafless trees swayed and bent ; and the snow, which had fallen lightly days ago, but, thanks to the frost, still lay about here and there, was carried up into the keen blue air, and once more cast upon the clean-swept earth. But as we left the low-lying land, and climbed the downs, the blasts were terrific. Fortunately, they came from behind, for otherwise we

could not possibly have held on our way. Conversation, although we were in a closed fly, was rendered impossible, and I was not sorry for it, for I had not heart for the blithe old lawyer's cheery talk, but was plunged in my own sad reflections.

Suddenly, however, an ejaculation from my companion made itself heard, and he hastily pushed down the window. "Look, look!" cried he excitedly. "Great Heavens, what a sight!"

We had by this time reached the summit of the downs, only a mile or two above the Point, and the vast stretch of ocean lay in view for the first time. To a landsman's eyes, the spectacle must in truth have been majestic : and even to mine, well accustomed to the ocean in her fits of fury, it was wondrous grand. The whole sea was sheeted with foam, while Hershell Bay, generally smooth, except in very rough weather, boiled like a cauldron. On the north-eastern side, where the reef lay, the spray spouted up in floods, and the short winter day was fast closing in.

"What a night awaits folks at sea," exclaimed the kindly lawyer. "It seems as though no ship could live in such a whirlpool."

The fly-man had stopped, either thinking that my companion's outspoken ejaculation had been addressed to

himself, or arrested by the spectacle before him, which was indeed unparalleled even on that coast.

“There *is* a ship, gentlemen,” cried he, for an instant leaving hold of his hat to point seaward with his whip.
“Poor souls!”

“I see no sail, Mr. Drake,” exclaimed the lawyer impatiently. “You have younger eyes, can you see any?”

“No sail could stand for a second in this tempest, Mr. Moulden,” answered I; “it would be blown to ribbons: the vessel will be scudding under bare poles. Yes, there she is: and—God help them—she is going straight on the reef.”

“Can we not warn them—can we make no signal?” enquired my companion, who had now got out of the conveyance, and was standing with myself and the driver under the lee of it, as it were. “Can *nothing* be done?”

“Nothing,” said I solemnly, for had I not seen a dozen noble ships in a similar strait, although never perhaps in one so desperate. “They know their danger better than we do. Look! she drifts no longer; they have thrown their anchors out.”

“Then she is saved,” exclaimed the lawyer. “I would give a thousand pounds to see her saved.”

“If her anchors hold,” observed I gloomily; “but they will not hold; I know that ground so well.”

"They are dragging already, Sir," said the fly-man, who was making a telescope of his hands. And, indeed, we could see her sensibly drawing nearer and nearer to her doom.

"Let us get on towards the sea," cried Mr. Moulden. "I cannot go to Sandiford while this is taking place. I will go with you, Mr. Drake."

"Alas Sir," said I, "my house cannot now receive a guest, or I should say welcome. But we can get down to the beach, of course, if that is your wish."

So the fly-man drove to the first zigzag, where we left him and the horses in comparative shelter from the fury of the wind, and hurried down to the shore. This was already lined with Hershell men, and among them Mr. Glendell, who had a telescope. He was too humane a man to think of anything save the peril of the poor souls before his eyes, and he only grasped my hand without questioning me.

"Is there no hope?" said I.

"No, none," answered he, "as you may see :" and he handed me his glass.

The vessel, which was a very large one, was now within a few feet only of the reef. Upon its decks the few sailors who had not been swept off by the huge seas were engaged in cutting away the masts, of which there were

three, and the rigging. The ship soon tumbled about a mere hull in the trough or on the summit of the waves.

I offered the telescope to the lawyer, but his hands trembled so excessively that he could see nothing through it. "I am glad I don't live here," said he with agitation, "to see such sights as this!"

The men about us were looking on gravely enough, but without any passionate excitement.

"I never knew a storm like this," answered Mr. Glendell; "nor the wreck of so great a vessel. She must have a great many souls on board. I fear we only see a few; the rest are below."

"Where is Rosa?" enquired I.

"Getting all things ready, in case we can be of any help; but they will not be needed. Nothing with life could come ashore in such a sea as this."

"There she goes, stern foremost," cried a man beside us.

"What! gone down?" exclaimed the lawyer. "Surely I see her yet."

"No, Sir; gone on the reef."

"I'll give a hundred pounds," cried Mr. Moulden, "to the man who takes a rope out to that ship."

"No man without wings could do it, Sir," returned the fisherman quietly. We were standing under the cliff in

comparative shelter, and could converse easily enough, because the wind was blowing aslant from off the land, and right on to the reef. "It is now only a question of a few minutes. When her cable parted, her last hope was gone. See, she is coming broadside on ! There—now she is gone !" And yonder, true enough, there was now no object to be seen save the wild waves, leaping and roaring, as though exulting over their captured prey.

"It is all over," said Mr. Glendell reverently. "God help them !"

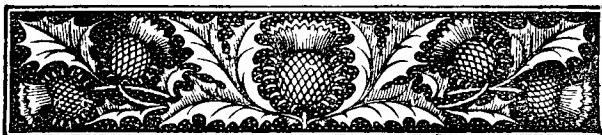
"What ! must they all drown ?"

"Ay, all, Sir," said the fisherman. "By to-morrow morn, there will be plenty come ashore, most like ; but they will be dead men."

"It was a fine ship, too."

"Do you know what ship it was ?" asked I, with a selfish heart-throb.

"Yes ; I know her well ; she was an Indiaman—the *Star of the West*. She came round from Daisyport only this very morning."



CHAPTER XVI.

LEFT ALONE.

WHAT a day had I just passed ! What an eight and forty hours of sleepless anxiety, and bitter loss, and then of loss again, though of another sort, and again of vain pursuit, ending in that tragedy of shipwreck. And now that Mr. Moulden had gone on his way to Sandiford, and I was to return to my desolate home with what it held, the Thing that was no more my dear, kind, noble Uncle Theo, a cold shudder crossed over me. Mr. Glendell said : “ You must come with me to-night, Marmy, else you will want nursing.” I knew that he spoke the truth. This sudden change from the quiet uneventful life in which every day repeated itself, had been too much for me. Until I had taken some food, the doctor would not allow me to enter upon the

subject of my late expedition, and even then he was against it; only Rosa, who was a wiser physician than himself where the mind was concerned, contended, as I afterwards found out, that it was better for me to say my say.

“Well,” said the doctor, musing, when I had finished my story, “it is so far satisfactory that the matter is over: there is no more suspense to be endured. The Hindu, poor devil, has escaped us, and there’s an end. So now, early as it is, go to bed, Marmy; and if you can sleep four and twenty hours, so much the better.”

I did as I was bid—it seemed so pleasant to me to be directed—to be no longer dependent on myself alone; and, although my rest was troubled with hideous dreams, I did sleep until after daybreak. Then I arose, and finding that my host had already gone down to the beach, I followed him. The shore was strewn with spars and timbers; but the sea, after its day of fury, had sunk to almost a dead calm; in the still blue air, one could hear the voices of the men who thronged the shore, in almost as great numbers as the previous night, for a great distance: some were in boats at the end of the reef, above the very place where the great ship had gone down; but most of them were looking for what had been cast ashore, as usual.

“He would be a good haul,” said one to another; “and a deal more worth having, if we could find him, than ever he was when alive.”

“You may say that,” answered the other. “His master was a very different sort—God bless him. But how strange it was that they two should have gone and died within twelve hours of one another, eh?”

“Ay, strange indeed.”

Of whom could they be talking, unless of my uncle and his servant? I listened eagerly, but they said no more until I came up with them.

“Have many bodies come on shore?” enquired I.

“No, Mr. Marmaduke; half-a-dozen poor sailors; and that’s all. The passengers, you see, were under hatches; and they say out yonder that the ship has settled down quite upright, and did not break amidships, as we thought certain. I doubt whether we shall find him as you’re looking for at all.”

“Him that I am looking for?”

“Yes, Sir; the poor black fellow as was Mr. Braydon’s man. Mr. Glendell told us as you wished to have him buried right and proper, and has offered ten pounds to whoever finds him.”

I nodded, but did not speak.

It was clear that Mr. Glendell did not consider the

matter wholly ended, as he had endeavoured to convince me. There was still a chance of finding the Hindu's body, and with it the secret. At this idea I seemed to feel new life. Action, at all events for the nonce, lay now before me, not merely barren regret and choking grief. Had not my uncle enjoined on me to recover Sangaree Tannajee *dead or alive?*

Presently, I saw Mr. Glendell searching with the rest, and began to thank him for his forethought in the matter. "It would indeed be a comfort to me," said I, "if the corpse should be found; and besides, although you could not have known it, the packet was wrapped in sealskin, so that the salt water will not hurt what it contains."

"That's well," returned the doctor; but by no means with the satisfaction I had expected from him, since he had been of late so eager about the secret. "We can but do our best; in a few hours the thing must be decided one way or the other."

"Why in so short a time?" enquired I, for I knew that bodies would often come ashore for many days, and even weeks, after such shipwrecks.

"Well, this is a curious case, Marmy; the vessel has gone down at the very extremity of the reef, and almost outside it, so that when she breaks up, all she contains

may go hither and thither, and not necessarily come into the bay."

"And if what we look for did come," said I, unable to repress a shudder, "it would, I suppose, after a very few days, be totally unrecognisable, no matter how great was the diversity from its fellows while in life?"

"Why, yes ; you know yourself what difficulties there have been here in the matter of identification. Two mothers claiming the same body as that of their drowned son, and so forth," observed the doctor coolly. "The features of the dead, in this country at least, are not generally recognisable after eight and forty hours. I remember, in the hospital in which I learned my trade, there was a leather body which was sworn to once or twice by enthusiastic witnesses. There is nothing which more requires, and less often receives, a cool judgment than the identification of the dead. But I am speaking, of course, of bodies which have been exposed to atmospheric influences ; the sea is a great antiseptic, and as long as the subject is kept under water——"

The doctor, diffuse only upon professional subjects, would doubtless have extended his lecture considerably, but that at this moment a number of fishermen began to run together towards one part of the beach, and we could see some huge object floating towards them.

“Good Heavens ! it’s some poor woman,” ejaculated the doctor.

Then a great shout of laughter broke from the men : it jarred discordantly enough, as may well be supposed, upon such a scene, and I felt hot with shame and anger.

“The brutal scoundrels !” said the little doctor fiercely ; and off we both ran to the spot in question. We could scarcely believe our ears when we heard, as we drew near, the shouts of mirth repeated ; for Hershell folks, although used enough to such spectacles, were never callous, and far less ruffianly. Their own perils in the deep made them pitiful for the victims of the sea.

“What is it, men ? Are you mad ?” cried I, who had outstripped my companion.

“Lor bless ye, Mr. Marmaduke ; only look at this. We thought it was some drowned fellow-creature, and it’s only the blessed figure-head.”

And indeed there was the huge female figure which had adorned the prow of the sunk ship, comparatively uninjured—for the Indiaman had struck, as I said, stern foremost—with *Star of the West* carved beneath it in large gold letters.

“How Tragedy and Comedy go hand in hand together through the world,” mused I.

“True,” said the doctor : “the very observation, while

speaking of Tannajee and your poor uncle, Mrs. Blunt made last night."

"What!" exclaimed I, surprised, "did you see her last night?"

The doctor looked confused. "Yes," said he. "I thought it right to ride over to Sandiford, when you had gone to bed, to tell her what had happened to Mr. Braydon, and about the wreck."

"That was very good of you," said I; "you think of everything for me; although, indeed, I suppose it was Rosa who thought of that?"

"No; it was entirely my own idea," answered Mr. Glendell carelessly. "Well, we can do no good here that these fellows cannot do for us; let us go in to breakfast."

My thoughts were too much occupied with weightier matters to dwell upon it at that time, but even then, it seemed to me a very strange thing that the doctor, who loved his ease, should, on such a stormy night, have gone to tell Mrs. Blunt what she must needs already have heard hours before from the lips of Mr. Moulden.

All that day, and the next, I watched the sea with keener expectation than any wrecker; but the dreadful gift for which I looked with such weird longing it refused

to give, and we were told that now it would never come. On the third day, Mr. Glendell had a long and serious talk with me. "You are very far from well, Marmy," said he; "you do not eat, nor, as I fear, sleep. Is it not so?"

"I do not sleep much," said I; "but I am well and strong."

"That is impossible, my friend; the state of excitement in which you at present subsist seems to you to be strength, but it is in reality wearing out your stamina, and when it leaves you, there will be danger." He felt my pulse, looked graver still, and shook his head. "When the wave of life flows as yours does, Marmy, it strands a man almost like those poor fellows on the beach yonder. I fear low fever for you at the best. You must have quiet; you must indeed."

I felt he spoke the truth, for though I was not sensible of fatigue, I knew no rest, to be called such. I loathed my food, and every morsel went nigh to choke me; my veins seemed to flow not with blood, but fire; but I also felt that the remedy which he proposed was utterly beyond my reach. Quiet! My brain was filled with thoughts that pressed so close upon each other's heels, that there was not a moment's space between them: yet not with thoughts, but rather with visions, dreams, and

ghastly chimeras. I could not think, in the ordinary sense, at all ; I could not have written a sentence of my usual literary work, for instance, if it had been to save my own life, or recall that of my beloved Uncle Theo. Even Rosa had no power to soothe me.

"I cannot but reproach myself," said Mr. Glendell, "for my own part in this matter ; if I had not been so eager to help you to get back this wretched Hindu, you would have been less anxious to do so, and by this time have put up with the loss. But now you are consumed with a vain longing for a secret which is hidden for ever in the depths of the sea."

I did not attempt to gainsay this. How could I, whom the first dawn of morning and the last faint flush of sunset had found watching by the calm and mocking deep, and to whom all night there appeared hideous shapes, all with some fantastic likeness to the form he spoke of, and each with a finger at its lips ! If ever there was a haunted wretch, it was I.

"Now, look you, Marmy," continued the doctor ; "if you do not wish myself and Rosa—for it was she who finally decided you upon undertaking this idle search, and she regrets it as bitterly as I do—to have your illness on our consciences, you will do your best to face this matter like a man. While there was hope, I clung

to it as closely as did you. I confess that I was bitten with the mystery that hung about that wretched creature, and would have given much, especially of late, to solve it. But now that there is no hope, I bow to Fate's decree. It is foolish, it is wicked to oppose oneself to that. From henceforth, I think no more of Sangaree Tannajee and the secret, which is buried with him for ever. I will not speak of him more, nor suffer others beneath my roof to do so: and to-morrow, when we have laid your dear good uncle in his grave, I leave this place, to spend a month in town, whither business calls me, and I shall take you with me."

Then ensued the nearest approach to a quarrel that ever took place between myself and good Mr. Glendell. I felt the force of his reasoning, and I gave him every credit for his excellent intention, but I knew better than he did the disease that was in my own mind, and how powerless would be his remedy to cure it. Nay, I was well convinced that to tear myself away from Hershell just now would only be to aggravate my symptoms. It was at the doctor's house, which was inland, that, notwithstanding Rosa's presence there, I always felt worse: whereas by the shore, and with my eyes fixed on the deep, that had robbed me of my secret, and held it in its bosom, I was more tranquil. I cannot explain my

condition : but I have heard that some folks whose hopes are centered in a Chancery suit, are, however frail their chance of gaining it, for ever haunting Lincoln's Inn, as though the very locality where the trial is pending soothes their anxiety, notwithstanding that they only hear bad news there ; and so perhaps it was with myself —a baffled suitor of the unjust sea. At all events, I was firmly determined, while the timbers of the *Star of the West* yet held together beyond the reef yonder, beneath that treacherous dimple of the smiling deep—for both days and nights were now summer-like in their calm—to remain at Hershell, notwithstanding I was informed on all hands that when the ship did break up, it was certain, from her situation, that should any bodies be still in her, they would drift seaward, and never come to shore.

I was therefore adamant to all the doctor's appeals, though, when persuasion failed, he did not hesitate to use sharpness. To Rosa (as I afterwards learned) he even said : “ Unless we take him with us, when we come back we shall have to tend a madman ; ” whereby of course he secured her most earnest co-operation in his efforts. But all failed. At home I was resolved for the present to stay. And after we had reverently laid dear Uncle Theo in his last resting-place, Mr. Glendell and

Rosa started for town, leaving me alone at the Point, to which I had now returned.

How little I guessed what a change was to take place in me, and in life's prospects, before I beheld them again !





CHAPTER XVII.

MY AMPHIBIOUS FRIEND.

HAM now coming to an event, with the narration of which, since the experience happens only to very few persons, and those of an illiterate sort, I might hope, from its very rarity, to interest my readers ; but, unfortunately, circumstances unqualified me for the task of description. Had the event occurred to me a few days earlier in my little life-story, I venture to think I might have related it to an audience that would not have refused me their attention ; or, had it happened later—supposing that nature had exerted her healing forces, and made me myself again—then also I might have succeeded. But if, at the period of which I speak, my mind was not absolutely off its balance, it was worn and weak, disturbed by vague desires, and altogether un-

fitted for receiving or retaining impressions however striking.

On the afternoon which first found me alone at Her-shell Point, and within an hour or two of the burial of its late master, I was sitting in his deserted chamber, looking as usual out to sea, when, among the well-known objects in the bay, I suddenly perceived a new one. A small sloop had rounded the extremity of the reef, and cast anchor immediately over the spot where the Indiaman lay sunk. I had myself visited the place in a small boat, and gazed down with a beating heart through the still blue deep upon what the sailors had assured me was the veritable wreck itself wedged upright between the rocks almost in the same position as when she had sailed upon the surface ; but, to my comparatively unaccustomed eyes, the water had seemed a little darker in the spot thus indicated, and that was all. Why the sloop had stationed itself there, I could not imagine ; but it was evident, from the number of small boats that were making for it from the shore, that a great significance was attached to its presence. I was out of the house in a moment, and ran down to the shore. Let it not be imagined that I was actuated with any mere object of curiosity, or that I seized with avidity on any opportunity of forgetting the loss which had so recently befallen me. It was because

I remembered it so well, because I lamented my dear protector so truly, that I was thus moved. That wreck, as I believed, still held the secret which he had enjoined upon me to become possessed of; and anything that seemed to connect itself with that, had an attraction for me which it is impossible to describe. An old fisherman of my acquaintance and his son were putting off just as I reached the beach, and I jumped into their boat.

"You are going to that sloop yonder, are you not?" enquired I.

"Ay, ay, Sir. Everybody seems to take his look at her, and so why not we? Not that she's much of a craft to look at neither, except for what she carries."

"And what is it she carries?"

"Why, bless my soul, Sir, don't 'ee know? Why, they was talking of nothing else this morning up at the *Rainbow*. But I forgot you were otherwise engaged, Mr. Marmaduke;" and the man pointed respectfully to my black clothes and the deep band round my sailor's cap. "He was a kind soul, was your good uncle, and we shall all miss him, old and young, in this place."

"But the sloop," said I, "why is she anchored out there, where nothing has anchored before?"

"Well, Sir, Lloyds has sent her down to pick up the pieces. When a ship went down in my time, she was

gone, and there was an end of her ; but now, if she has not sunk in very deep water, and what is known to have been in her makes it worth while, they send down a craft like that, with divers in her."

" Divers ! " cried I joyfully ; and in a moment I forgot restless nights and foodless days, and snatching up the spare oars by my side, began to aid the boatman. How fortunate it seemed that I had remained at Hershell now ! There was surely a hope, and a good hope, of wresting from the sullen sea its secret yet.

" You see, Sir," went on the old man, " the Indiaman had treasure on board ; they do say fifty thousand pounds in gold ; and luckily the weather has been calm, just as if wind and wave had wore themselves out with that last gale ; so that, though they have wasted precious time, there is a chance of getting something worth having out of Davy's Locker. They're setting to work already, you see."

But although, with my head turned half-round, I was watching the sloop earnestly with every oar-stroke, I could see nothing save a bright gleam of the winter sun suddenly strike, as it seemed, the vessel's side, and then become quenched in the waves.

" That was the diver's helmet, Mr. Marmaduke. He has just gone under."

In a few minutes or two, then, that man, whom I had just seen disappear beneath the sea, would visit the wreck, would doubtless go on board of it—if one might so speak of what was under the water—would perhaps even see the very thing of which I was in search, and which I would have given ten years of my life to stand face to face with! I could hear my heart beat between the pulses of the oars.

We were received, though not very willingly, on board the sloop ; the number of visitors had somewhat interfered with the operations ; half the inhabitants of the little hamlet were standing on her deck, looking on with wonder at the mechanical contrivances, or watching at the ship's side for the return of the diver, with scarcely less of awe than those who, by the Pool of Bethesda, awaited the angel's advent. On the platform beside the air-pumps stood the men whose mission it was to minister to the wants of their comrade beneath, to attend to his slightest signal, to give their undivided care of eye and hand to him, and to him only. They were forbidden to interchange a word even with one another, lest their attention should be diverted for that instant, which might perchance be a fatal one to the adventurer below. For my part, I could not keep my eyes off the rounds of the little ladder, which, fixed to the ship's side, led down it to

the depths below, and had its foot resting on the very bottom of the sea. I could count, through the clear blue water, no less than eight of these rounds, after which nothing was to be seen ; yet the man who had just left his fellows in air and sunlight, to explore the unknown floor of ocean, had to descend fifty feet lower than our sight could reach. The *Star of the West* had gone down in ten-fathom water.

We had in reality scarce a quarter of an hour to wait, though to me it seemed a weary time ere bubbles of air began to make their appearance on the surface, and then a bright, round, luminous mass pushed through it, which was the helmet of the diver. It was a frightful sight, that exaggerated likeness of a human head, with its huge goggle-eyes of glass, coming up from the depths of the sea ; while the metal collar round his neck, and the leads about his shoulders, and the gray dripping garments that clothed his lower limbs, were almost equally striking. A dagger was stuck in the belt about his loins, and his great shoes were soled with lead. It took several minutes, and more than one *valet de chambre*—each a grinning seaman—to disencumber this marine monster of his upper clothing, and transform him into a creature of the land. Then his face showed an honest fellow enough, with nothing of peculiarity about it except a certain air of gravity and de-

termination, that redeemed the commonplaceness of the features. He went down the cabin-stairs to make his report to some official, and then we Hershell folks were informed that we had had our treat, and must now depart, for that our presence interfered with business. There were coils of gutta-percha looking tubes, and things more delicate than are usually found on shipboard, strewed all about the deck, and perhaps it was feared some damage might be done. But while the rest of the visitors obeyed and took to their boats, I spoke a few words with one in authority, and added thereto a golden reason for my remaining where I was ; and the old fisherman, having also explained that I was a young gentleman of distinction, and the proprietor of the mansion in the foreground, I was presently made welcome enough by the skipper himself.

It seemed, by the report of the diver, that the Indian-man stood really almost upright and fast between certain rocks, but had been so beaten about by the fury of the storm, that it would be difficult to effect an entrance ; and for this purpose, when he took his second trip, he carried an axe with him, which rendered his appearance still more formidable. I had made this man also my friend, by adding another metallic substance to the various weights with which he was furnished, and had

given him to understand that a true narration of all that he found on board the sunk ship would be well remunerated. On this occasion, he remained under water for a considerable time, and when his helmet was removed, appeared greatly exhausted. He had entered the Indian-man, but had been unable to make his way to the strong room, the reasons for which he gave at length to his superior. When I pressed him for details upon other points, he said that was not the time for spinning yarns; and when the others asked him how he had fared, he replied surlily that it was altogether an ugly job. It seemed that he was a good deal put out by having to undertake the adventure alone—a mate who had promised to work with him having broken faith at the last moment. Having made a third trip, as fruitless as the other two, he resisted all solicitation to make another that day, and the weather still holding calm, it was arranged that the next descent was to be made at sunrise.

“I am going ashore, young Sir, for the night,” said he, “for I am a landsman when I am not under water; and if you choose to come and stand a pot and a pipe at the inn, I can then tell you my story.”

“Nay,” said I, “you shall lodge at my house yonder, and be welcome to all that it affords.” For, indeed, there was no other human being whom I was just then so in-

clined to greet as guest as the man who had explored that sunken ship, and doubtless come face to face with its drowned company.

So, within an hour or two, John Dewsnap, this new amphibious acquaintance of mine, was sitting with me after dinner in the study at the Point, with one of those cheroots between his lips which master and man had been wont to prize so highly, but which neither was to smoke again. Curiously enough, now that I was free to ask any questions I pleased regarding that matter which was so near to my heart that for the present it almost ousted loving regret itself, I felt averse to the subject ; or perhaps rather, I feared to put the enquiry direct, an answer to which in the negative would have crushed all my hopes at once. I preferred to encourage my companion to talk of his experiences elsewhere than on Her-shell Reef; and certainly they were strange enough, and would, under ordinary circumstances, have interested me deeply. My eyes were fixed earnestly upon the speaker ; I scanned with the deepest concern those bluff and honest features, upon which perhaps the filmy eyes of the dead Hindu had so lately been fixed, and he doubtless imagined me a wrapt listener. But in truth I scarcely heard him. I remember dimly what he did say, but I mix his various weird adventures up one with the other, so that the whole

resembles the recollection of a nightmare. There was one touching story, however, which survives the rest—how on the south coast somewhere, when engaged upon a sunken emigrant ship, which had struck a rock at night in smooth water, and gone down when all the passengers were sleeping, he had found a young woman lying peacefully in her berth with her long dishevelled hair floating like seaweed : and how he had told of this until the rumour reached her betrothed, a young officer of the line, who had come down and put her photograph into his hand, and said: ‘Is that the girl you saw?’ And when he answered ‘Yes,’ the young man besought him to cut off a lock, and bring it up to him, as the last token of his dead love, and to take from her finger the ring which he had given her as the sign of their betrothal.

“And did you do it?” enquired I.

“Well, Sir, I cut the lock off ; but to despoil the dead, even though it was no robbery, I dared not. You don’t know what it is to see folks lying beneath the sea, not motionless, as on a death-bed—ah, Sir ;” and a shudder ended the sentence, and Mr. Dewsnap took his whisky and water all at a gulp, and helped himself to more. “No, Mr. Drake, mine is an ugly trade enough as it is, having to look upon drowned folks, without meddling with them. I don’t mind breaking into the strong rooms

and getting out the gold for my employers ; but for nobody on earth have I ever touched a drowned fellow-creature, except that once, to please that poor young fellow, and no money would have tempted me to do that."

"But, surely," urged I, "if there be anything, such as important papers, for instance, which may be even more valuable than gold, and of vital consequence to the living, a diver would not hesitate to recover it, even though it were upon the person of a drowned man ?"

"Some divers maybe would not," answered my companion coldly ; "but Jack Dewsnap would, if I know him. No, Sir, it's bad enough to go about one's work with axe and rope, while such company are looking on, without having anything to do with *them*."

"Are there any—any poor drowned folks," asked I with a hesitation that my companion took for fear, "in the ship you went down into to-day ?"

The diver nodded. "Yes, plenty. It's an ugly job, as I told you. The poor souls were under hatches, you see. The passengers, both fore and aft, are down below."

How terrible it seemed to know that less than half a mile away there were swaying beneath the waves, in the very places built for them to live in, dead men and

women, more numerous, probably, than all the inhabitants of Hershell village. But it was not only awe that seized me : I was devoured with the thought, that probably within the reach of this man's hand lay the secret of my life. And oh, if I could but persuade him to bring it back to me from the depths of the sea !





CHAPTER XVIII.

IN ARMOUR.

“**D**ID you happen to notice, Mr. Dewsnap, any drowned persons in particular in either of the cabins? Forgive me, if I give you annoyance in asking such a question; it is not mere curiosity which prompts me, but something very far from that.”

“Well, Sir, I honestly tell you I don’t like to talk of such things. It seems to me like telling something I ought not to tell—the secret of the sea—as can at any moment—by the giving way of a valve, or the bursting of a tube, or the inattention of them fellows above—*be my death*, you understand. It may be a superstition, but I suppose I have a right to my own views;” and my companion devoted himself to his cheroot in a manner which I had known in Tannajee to mean high displeasure.

“I am very sorry,” said I, “to press you to speak on such a distasteful matter. But you once, as you told me yourself, did a very kind action to oblige a fellow-creature, and I cannot but think you will do another. Just answer me this, then—I cannot say—for I do not know myself—how much depends on your reply: Is there, or is there not, among the rest of the drowning persons in that Indiaman, a Hindu?”

My companion smoked like a furnace; then after a pause, during which my brain seemed on fire, and all the objects in the room became indistinct, he nodded, and answered surlily: “Yes; in the fore-cabin.”

“Then, if I were to give you twenty-five pounds,” said I, taking out my purse with the money with which Mr. Glendell had supplied me for this very purpose, though under circumstances of which he had little dreamed, “would you not take out of that man’s waist-belt, to-morrow morning, a pocket-book of sealskin which you will find there, and bring it to me?”

“No, Sir,” answered my companion resolutely; “nor yet for twenty-five hundred pounds. And let me add, though I am a poor diver, and you are a young gentleman, that you are doing wrong to tempt me!”

“It cannot be wrong,” urged I, “to ask you to recover what is my own property.”

“Well, I can’t do it, Sir. If my mate were here now, he would no more mind such a piece of work than eating his bread and cheese. Men are not all made alike, you see. But besides that, and even if I could bring myself to do what you ask, I took an oath, when I cut the lock of hair from that poor girl (I seem to see her now looking up at me, as though to ask, Who is this that robs the dead?), that I would never more touch a drowned creature ; and I am not going to break my oath ; so there’s an end.”

“Is there any chance of your mate joining you ?”

“Well, yes, I dare say he’ll come when he’s had his big drink out, for that’s what’s keeping him, *I* know. But when he does come, it’s ten to one the weather will have broken up, and perhaps the ship with it. I’m sorry that I can’t oblige you, Sir, and I thank you for your entertainment ; and now, since my work begins at sunrise, I must get to bed.”

“One minute,” said I earnestly. “I am not about to ask you to do violence to your feelings, and far less to break your oath. But I see one way still wherein it lies in your power to help me.”

“Well, then, Sir, you may consider that your request is granted,” said my companion cheerfully, “for I should greatly like to be of service to you.”

“I thank you warmly, Mr. Dewsnap ; but beside my

gratitude, I will gladly give you this same sum of twenty-five pounds if you will only let me put on your mate's apparel, and go down with you to-morrow under the sea."

"Go down with me!" ejaculated my companion. "Why you don't know what you ask! I do not speak of the danger, for I could look after you as to that, but of the fear of the danger. The first walk under the water is no light matter, I can tell you, even to rough fellows like myself; but a delicate young gentleman such as you—why, you might swoon with terror; and as for going aboard that ship, and seeing the sights as I saw yesterday, why, it would kill you outright."

"It will kill me outright," said I solemnly, "if you refuse this request of mine, my good friend. If I look, as you say, delicate, I did not do so a week ago, but was as strong as you are. It is the loss of that little packet of which I speak that has done it all. I can neither sleep nor eat for thinking of it. It contains all I have in the world. And as for fear, I cannot possibly be so much afraid of anything as of losing what it contains. Come, Mr. Dewsnap; you have passed your promise, and I think you are not the man to go back from your word."

"No; you are right there, Sir; although if I had known what you were about to ask, I should not have been so ready with my "yes." But unfortunately —

or rather, fortunately for you—the matter does not lie in my hands at all. The skipper would not permit your attempting such an adventure, even if I consented to be your companion. Otherwise, since you wish it so much, and feel such confidence in your own pluck, and offer so handsome a sum, I would have done it to oblige you, I would indeed."

"If I have any knowledge of a man by his looks," said I, "the skipper is not one to get up at sunrise to see you over the ship's side ; and as you know, he sleeps ashore at the *Rainbow*. Let us reach the sloop a little before daylight ; so that I shall not be recognised, and do you clap my helmet on for me in the cabin. Then who can tell I am not your expected mate, arrived last night ?"

Mr. John Dewsnap exhaled his tobacco-smoke very slowly, gave a wistful glance at the bank-notes and gold which I had placed upon the table, and scratched his head with uncommon violence.

"Well, that certainly *is* a knowing dodge !" exclaimed he with undisguised admiration. "When once the helmet's on, as you say, there is no knowing one of us magnified tadpoles from another. Yet, if anything was to happen to you—and it *might*, you know—I should be tried for manslaughter."

"You would be tried for nothing of the kind, my good

friend," returned I smiling. "I go by my own urgent wish ; so that, if anything were to happen, it would be suicide. I take that risk on my own shoulders.—Just put that money in your pocket and go off to bed."

"No, no, Sir ; I never receive my pay beforehand ; and besides, if you didn't come back safe and sound, it would be like taking blood-money. But there ; Jack Dewsnap's word has been passed, and so I'll risk it."

I wrang my companion's hand, and wished him a cordial good-night. As for me, though I was not afraid of oversleeping myself, I did not go to bed at all. Without the least apprehension that I was not legally competent to do so, for I was as ignorant of such matters as a child, I made my will, leaving all I had in the world to Rosa—that is, the future proceeds from the sale of the Point—with the exception of a legacy to each of the two servants, and something to dear Mrs. Blunt, to show her I had not forgotten her kindness. This document my guest was to witness before I started on my perilous errand. Then I wrote a long letter to my darling, telling her how irresistibly I was impelled to undertake the coming adventure, and exonerating the diver all I could. I entreated her not to fret for long, even though she should never see me again, and wished her, with all my heart, a worthier lover. All this took me a long time, and longer

because the fever of my blood made me unfit for writing of any sort. My anxiety was such that it seemed to me now that I had really not exaggerated matters when I told the diver that it would kill me if I were to lose what I had so set my heart upon—the recovery of the lost secret. Thus the night crept away; and one hour and a half before dawn I went to my companion's room, and awoke him.

“What!” cried he with amazement; “and are you really in the same mind this morning, Sir, that you were in last night? I did not think that it would have been so, I assure you. Well, you're a good-plucked one, at all events, so that I have the less fear of you when you and I shall be among the fishes.”

Seeing that I was still bent upon the undertaking, Mr. Dewsnap very wisely did his best to keep my spirits up, and while we sat at our early meal, began to speak of the affair before us in quite a jocular vein. He made me eat in spite of myself, and after the meal he recommended a glass of brandy, which seemed to do me good. Then as I led the way through the darkness to the beach, he impressed upon me a few matters to be observed during the task before us; all which I listened to most attentively at the time, but whereof I can recall little now, except that four pulls at the air-pipe meant “Haul up,” which he re-

iterated again and again. “Whatever you forget when the sea is rolling fathoms over you, be sure you remember *that*.”

The idea thus presented so often to my notice was not a pleasant one, but I was still firm of purpose. Once only, as we pulled across the cold dark bay for the sloop’s light, I had it on the tip of my tongue to ask : “Is there any chance, Mr. Dewsnap, of your mate’s turning up this morning ?” but I did not put the question. I felt that it would unhinge me to discuss that matter. I was wound up to the very last turn of my mental machinery ; nor, indeed, need this be wondered at. What were all the most trying *débuts* of youth compared with my case ! The first tooth out ; the first going to school ; the first fight ! Or even, to speak of the ordeals of later life, the first competitive examination ; the first dining with a lord —tremendous essay for English middle-class adolescence —or the popping the question to the first Angelina ! How all these pulse-hastening experiences fade to nothing before that adventure that was awaiting *me*—a descent into the unknown deep, to meet the company of the un-sheeted dead.

There was no watch kept on board the sloop, and we clambered up into her unobserved, and went directly to my companion’s cabin, the door of which he made fast.

"For," said he, "the hat you are going to wear is a heavy one, and you must not put it on until you're obliged." Then once more he gave me my instructions, which I repeated after him word for word. Over my ordinary clothes, I pulled on many woollen garments ere I stepped into the gray india-rubber dress, all in one piece, which is the diver's uniform ; this was tightly fastened around my neck ; and about my wrists, to keep my sleeves secure, were placed tight india-rubber rings. Already I seemed to feel by anticipation the oppression of the superincumbent water ; yet this part of my apparel was light and easy as a boating dress by comparison with what was to come.

Further operations were, however, for the present suspended, all being ready now for assuming my disguise at a moment's notice. The gray streak of morning had been stealing into the little cabin for some time before we heard anyone stirring aboard the sloop ; and "The longer we wait the better," said my companion, "for the more light we shall have for our work, and the warmer will be the water." But all this suspense was terrible to me, and I was glad enough to swallow another dram, drunk, as Mr. Dewsnap cheerily said, "to the success of our expedition," but of which he doubtless perceived I had need.

And yet I had only to think of the secret now almost within my clutch to feel as resolved as ever to do or die.

“Is not it time to be starting?” said I at last.

“I will go on deck and see,” returned my companion. “But it’s no use your making your appearance there until all is prepared.”

“Will not my voice be recognised?” enquired I doubtfully; not that I feared that any Hershell men would be on board at that early hour; but I was conscious that it was rather a thin and tremulous voice, not so much like that of a professional diver as of a landsman who goes under the sea for the first time, and hardly expects to come up again.

“Whatever there is to fear, you need not be afraid of *that*,” answered Mr. Dewsnap smiling. “All folks as work under water talk alike, bless you; and lest anyone should look in while I am away, by-the-bye, here’s your hat;” and first having placed over my head a sort of woollen nightcap, he put on my helmet.—“Now, how does that fit, young gentleman?”

“It seems very large,” returned I, in tones that not even my darling Rosa could possibly have known for mine. Indeed, like fear in Collins’s *Ode to the Passions*, I started at the sound myself had made.

“There, did I not tell you,” cried my companion, “that all folks as work under water talk alike?”

“I understand now,” returned I, in mumbling grumbling tones, which had a prolonged echo.

Then left alone, I went to the little looking-glass nailed to the cabin’s side, and surveyed myself through my huge glass spectacles, each like the bull’s-eye of a policeman’s lantern.

Certainly, no man could have identified me in such a costume, even if I were taken for a human being at all. My limbs, swathed in surplus clothing, looked double their usual size, and of the most ungainly formation ; on my shoulders was a sort of breast-plate of shining tin edged with copper, into which was fitted by screws a leathern jerkin, enclosing both chest and back. So far, I was cased, as it were, in villein’s armour, and trappings of a common foot-soldier of the middle ages, except for the india-rubber and the leaden soles to my shoes, which weighed ten pounds apiece. But the knightly part of my garb, the helmet, with its monstrous vizor, was the most striking ; its goggle-eyes and huge dimensions were alarming even to the wearer. As to the stories of divers thus appareled being attacked by sharks, I did not believe one word of them.

No fish that swims, thought I, would venture to
15—2

tackle such an apparition, or wag a fin at it, except in swift retreat. Could any sight that I was presently fated to behold be possibly more formidable than my own appearance? Yet a long knife hung in a copper sheath by my side, as though there were really enemies to be dreaded. My thoughts were cut short by a shudder.

Even what I now saw before me was not so horrible as what my imagination had of late conceived and my present fears anticipated. How merely grotesque was that masquerade of mine, in comparison with the dread realities of horror that awaited me; and with that idea for my sole companion, had I been left for long, I do not know but that my determination might have given way at the last moment; but, fortunately, the cabin door opened at this moment, and Mr. Dewsnap brought me the welcome news that all was prepared. He had put on his own uniform when he had attired me, so that there was no need of delay. "Only one word more," said he, "while we are yet above sea. No one yet, Mr. Drake, has ever come to harm while clad in this dress under English waters, and it is not likely that you will be the first victim, with a man who knows his business like Jack Dewsnap to take care of you."

I clasped my companion's hand, and thanked him

warmly for the good intention which had prompted this remark ; but it was not worth while to tell him that I scarcely feared the going beneath the sea at all in comparison with the sights that I might meet there.

Then we two went up on deck.





CHAPTER XIX.

THE SUNK SHIP.

“**B**ETTER late than never,” was the observation addressed to me by the skipper, as I came on deck ; and I grumbled through my vizor such an assent as any tardy diver who has no excuse for his delay might be supposed to give. “If Dewsnap had chanced upon the Indiaman’s strong room yesterday, you would have missed your wage, young man,” added he severely.

“There, don’t fash him !” exclaimed my supposed mate. “If he was late for yesterday, he’s in time for to day.”

At this moment, I felt what were two enormous hands laid upon me on chest and back, and began to struggle against what I thought was some practical joke, imposed upon me by way of punishment.

"Be quiet, mate," cried Dewsnap angrily ; "and don't play the fool, now you are come."

Then I remembered that they were but hanging about my shoulders those huge weights of lead which I had seen placed upon the diver on the previous day, to make him sink, and I determined for the future to remain silent and sullen, like one who was offended, so as to run no further risk of self-betrayal. This resolve, however, was quite unnecessary, for at this moment somebody clapped a sort of glass box over the mouthpiece of my helmet, and screwed it tightly on, so that I could neither hear nor speak. Moreover, I was almost ceasing to breathe, when the air-pump began to work, and supply me with the vital fluid. These practical details, although thus unpleasantly forcing themselves upon my notice, were not unwelcome, for they prevented my thoughts from dwelling on the ordeal before me. Otherwise, at this supreme moment, my courage, like that of Bob Acres, might have oozed out at my finger-ends, which was the only means of egress left for it. My hands alone were in contact with the atmosphere ; the rest of my person was swathed and pent in like a mummy—weighted, too, as no mummy ever was, so that, when they signed to me to approach the ladder that led beneath the sea, I stood motionless for a second, and then could hardly move one leg before the other.

However, my companion, similarly accoutred, was preceding me, so that I was not much noticed. He had luckily remembered to volunteer to carry the axe, or, I am sure, with all my natural activity, I could not have made the descent at all. Besides my air-pipe, I had a string, which was to guide me to the rope-ladder, in case I lost my way in the sea ; but of course it was not my intention to part from my companion for an instant.

So long as I was in the air, although I only felt it on my hands, my descent was comparatively easy ; but as soon as my limbs entered the water, they began, notwithstanding I was so heavily weighted, and the sea was calm, to sway about, and to be impelled upwards in a surprising manner.—I have of late read M. Esquiro's book on English Divers, and am bound to say that the narrative of his own experience in this matter is most accurate, and in no way exaggerated ; but he did not descend by some fathoms so deep as I ; and although we were both favoured with calm, my adventure was in winter-time, which has never such entirely smooth seas as summer. However, the experiment is sufficiently trying to the nerves under any circumstances, and how severely so, may be guessed from my laying any stress upon such matters, who had such far more terrible things in immediate expectation. Indeed, nervously apprehen-

sive of the latter as I was, I thought not of them for the space of a full minute, when first I got beneath the surface, and saw the sunlit water weltering above my head. The impulse, at that juncture, to return to my own native atmosphere, and become, as it were, a man again, was stronger than I can describe. Nature herself seemed battling within me against my audacious and perhaps impious project. There was a whirlpool in my brain, that only did not deafen me because I was deaf already. I had voluntarily resigned my powers of speech and hearing, and had now cut my other senses off from communication with all my kind, save that one man, himself more like a monster, who awaited me at the foot of the ladder. I could still see, although, as I descended, the light became more and more obscure, till it was little better than twilight. All, too, seemed insecure and uncertain; the rope-ladder moved as I moved, and even when I at last set my feet upon the solid sea-bottom, they were pushed this way and that way by the movement of the water. But here, to my intense relief, I found my trusty companion: he nodded his vast head, as though he were some dreadful gnome, who had been commissioned by his marine lord to bid me welcome to that weird region, and patted me approvingly on the shoulders. He could not take my hand, because I was clutching hold of the rope-ladder

with all my might with both ; and there he suffered me to remain for a minute or two, until I got somewhat accustomed to the situation.

I peered around, and presently things grew a little more distinct. I saw fishes swimming slowly by, not at all alarmed, but seemingly a good deal interested in our appearance. I saw the sloop above my head, and the air-tubes hanging down from it to my companion and me. I beheld the long-leaved seaweeds swaying and curling like serpents beneath my feet. Presently, I again felt a tap on my shoulder, and knew that it was time—that all I had hitherto undergone was as nothing to the experience that was about to present itself. Then the present difficulties at once began to decrease. I let go the ladder, and took one of my companion's hands, by help of which I managed to shuffle along for a few paces, when a huge dark object began to loom before us through the solid mist. It seemed to approach us like some monstrous whale, but in reality we were approaching it. It had indeed once moved through the waters swiftly enough, but it would never do so more. It seemed but a shapeless mass, so terribly had it been dealt with by wind and wave : but I knew at once that it was the wreck.

There was a breach almost in the centre, into which

we ascended with the utmost caution. The great peril of the diver's trade was now imminent. In exploring sunken ships, there is always danger of the air-tube getting twisted round something, or broken by a sudden turn. Once on what had been the deck, but what was now a mere congeries of broken planks and splinters, one could make out the parts of the vessel ; the head could be distinguished from the stern at least, and in the place where the mainmast had been, stood its fractured stump. Short as was the time since the catastrophe occurred, sand had intruded itself almost everywhere. I noticed all these things mechanically, but did not give them any real attention, and almost forgot that I was under the sea at all, so overwhelming was the idea that I was about to be in the presence of the unhappy man upon whom, in his perfidy, Death had fallen unawares—although, Heaven knows, my heart had forgiven him.

“ Our way lies here, to the right,” signed my companion pointing to the fore-cabin stairs.

These were not broken to pieces, like the more exposed portions of the vessel, and besides, they were edged with some metal ; but the hand-rails on both sides had been torn away, perhaps by human fingers in their last agony ; the skylight above was also destroyed, both wood and glass, so that, as we descended, we could see almost as

distinctly as on deck. The cabin, large as it was, seemed crowded with inmates, some on the sofas, sitting tranquilly enough, poor souls ! others at full length. A few were lying on the floor ; and one, a woman, with a child in her arms, knelt in front of us beseechingly, as though we had come to save them. So different was all around from what I had expected, so real and lifelike, that it was not terror which seized me so much as yearning pity. There was nothing absolutely terrible about the scene, because there was nothing to remind you that all these fellow-creatures were dead. Each figure had a slight but perceptible motion of its own, produced by the moving of the water, so that it was easy to imagine they breathed. In some cases, indeed, it was only by observing that they were maintained by the same element in a position that they could not have kept in the upper air, that the truth could be discovered. It must be remembered, too, that the general obscurity, as well as the thickness of the glass through which we beheld them, forbade any very accurate inspection, even if we had wished to use it. But my companion was as solicitous as myself to see as little as he could. He made his way along the floor, still holding my hand in his, towards the upper end of this apartment, each shrinking mechanically from those who involuntarily touched us upon our way. Then I suddenly

felt my guide's finger shift from my hand to my wrist, and I knew that we had reached the thing I sought.

The Hindu was standing almost upright—the only inmate of the cabin who so stood—clutching with his nails a beam of the ceiling, above which there was a great fissure right through to the deck. Perhaps the poor wretch had taken up that position to get air, for the cabin, before the diver had broken into it, had been fast closed; or, perhaps, with some despairing hope of escape. Heaven only knows. His face was turned towards me, with the eyes wide open, but with what expression I am thankful to say I cannot tell. All the terrors that had filled my dreams and troubled my waking thoughts were as nothing to the horrors of that moment, during which, even my companion, as he afterwards told me, shut fast his eyes. Still I kept repeating to myself: "It will be over in a moment, and it was my dear Uncle Theo's wish." If it had not been that he had left me his express injunction, I am sure that I should have left my task unfinished even at that last moment. But I set my teeth, and gathered myself together. I reached forth my hand to the folds of the linen, in which, by way of pocket, the Hindu had always placed his portable treasures—his box of opium; his money, when he had any; and a watch, which his master had given to him. They were all there, and be-

sides them the Sealskin Packet, to recover which I had undergone so much. My expectations had been well founded. I had reflected that he would not destroy it, nor its contents, since he was ignorant of their exact nature, and only knew that they were of value from their being kept in my uncle's secret drawer. I was only taking back my own, yet, as I did so, there seemed, to my fevered brain, to come into the dead man's face a look of reproach; and whether by my touch, or stirred by the displacement of the water by our presence, I know not, but he lost his hold of the beam, and sank slowly down upon the floor, ere I could turn my horror-stricken but fascinated gaze away.

Indeed, I know not how long I might have stood, as if riveted to that fatal spot, had not my companion gripped my arm, and dragged me to the cabin-stairs, and this time as fast as my apparel permitted me to move. He told me afterwards that he did not expect to get me to the upper air alive. Indeed, how, in my miserably weak condition from want of food and sleep, I ever went through with the adventure at all, surprises me even now, and especially how, when I had gained the object for which I had striven so vastly beyond my strength, I did not give in at once; but thanks to my faithful guide, I somehow or other arrived at the foot of the ladder.

There, hands and feet refused their office altogether, and my senses so forsook me that I even forgot the so often enjoined signal for those above to "Haul up." The last thing I remember was the transferring of the precious packet from my hand, in which I had hitherto tightly clasped it, to my waist-belt, after which all was blank.





CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET.

WHEN I first opened my eyes again, or at all events, remember doing so, it seemed to me that I was still beneath the sea ; the light about me was not that of day, and there was still a murmur in my ears like the whisper of the moaning waves. But presently the objects about me grew distinct — I was lying in a bed-chamber, that I recognised as the same in which I had slept, or tried to sleep, at Mr. Glendell's. The window-curtains were closely drawn, but they could not altogether exclude the noonday sunbeams, which danced upon the wall beside me. How bright and joyous they seemed to me after that dark journey !

At a table by the fireplace sat the surgeon, apparently engaged on some accounts. It appeared strange even to

myself that I was not surprised to see him, nor at my being where I was, nor interested in whatsoever might have happened to me of late. It was sufficient for me, through my half-closed eyes, to watch the sunbeams. What was nearest to me, and gave me the least trouble to observe, alone drew my attention. On the coverlet in front of me lay a white and almost transparent human hand. Did this belong, thought I, to one of those poor drowned women whom I had seen in the cabin down yonder, and whose hands were like it? At this idea I shuddered in every limb, whereby I perceived that I was looking at my own hand. It was all bone and whiteness, and little more than the shadow of its former self, yet it felt very heavy as I lifted it to my face, and felt how pointed was my chin, and placed my fingers in the hollows about my eyes, and in my sunken cheeks. Then a spoon was put to my mouth, and I swallowed, though with difficulty, something warm and grateful to my palate.

The little doctor was standing by my side with a kind smile, but his finger at his lips, and I tried to smile at him in return. "You must not speak, Marmy," said he softly; "you must lie quite still and quiet until you grow stronger."

I looked at my shrunken hand, and then at him enquiringly.

"Yes, you have been very ill, my dear lad ; but you will get well now. It's a long story, and you must not hear it yet."

My eyes still asked some question, and this time eagerly, passionately ; the noises in my brain began to increase.

"Quiet, quiet !" said he soothingly. "What you are thinking of is quite safe : it is under your pillow ;" and he took out the sealskin packet from where it lay, and once more placed it beneath my head.

Then, with an indescribable feeling of security and release from all earthly trouble, I fell asleep.

On my second waking, all things about me were the same ; but I no longer disregarded them ; my eyes took in everything that was to be seen. My thoughts had become submissive to control, and when Mr. Glendell came to my bedside, he did not this time say : "Hush," but whispered kindly : "What is it, Marmy ?" Then I murmured "Rosa ;" and my darling came.

She sat by me for an hour, talking of her late journey to town, of my own illness, and of Mrs. Blunt's solicitude on my account ; but not a word upon the subject which had monopolised my mind so long. I quite understood that the topic was forbidden until my strength returned, and dutifully acquiesced in that arrangement, the more so,

because whenever my fingers stole towards the packet, and touched it, there came again that roaring in my ears.

At last my patience was rewarded, only there was this drawback, that when Rosa began to listen to the narration of my late adventure, Mr. Glendell was always in the room with us; and when I felt the colour rise ever so little in my cheeks, or a light begin to burn in my eyes, he would interfere with: "That will do for to-day, Marmy." For what they were afraid of was lest the fever, which had wasted me to skin and bone, and fired my brain for many a day and night, should return, like some man-eating beast, and devour the miserable remains of me. Thanks, however, to the unremitting care of my host and his sweet daughter, it did not return; and after a weary time of languor and uselessness, I was got down stairs, and pronounced convalescent.

Then it was that I asked leave—for my word was pledged not to touch it without the surgeon's permission—to open the sealskin packet, and read what it contained to Mr. Glendell and Rosa.

"And so you shall," said the surgeon good-humouredly, "when you learn what the secret is from *us*. Not that we have peeped into that sacred packet of yours, believe me, for while you were alive we felt that it would be wrong to do so; but logic and sagacity supply the place

of mere foolhardiness, my friend.—Yes, Rosa, you may frown ; but I really cannot compliment him on that marine adventure. Mrs. Eleanor Blunt and myself—for I grant she helped me considerably in the matter—did not require to put on diving apparel, and explore the bottom of the sea for a secret which we had already guessed by the help of our own wits on dry land.”

“ You had already guessed ? ” said I in astonishment.

“ Yes, before I started for London ; nay, upon the very night when the wreck took place, I was in possession of the main fact which that paper will disclose. However, I must say I had some premises to go upon, which you were not possessed of. Let me begin at the beginning. On the day you went to Daisypore, not knowing how long you might be absent, I commenced the task you had intrusted to me, of setting your poor uncle’s house in order. In his study I found two books—the one that Table of Annuities which he had long given over consulting ; and the other, this volume upon Precious Stones. As I carelessly turned this latter over, it opened as if from frequent use, at a certain page, which seemed to me of great significance, since every printed word of it was underlined. I compared with what I read in it the various hints dropped by its late owner to yourself and others regarding the Hindu, and felt convinced that I held the clue of the

secret in my hand. When you came home that afternoon with Mr. Moulden, and told me that the man we sought was somewhere on board of that ill-fated ship, I felt that there was not a moment to be lost if what I suspected were indeed the case. But I wished to fortify my conclusion by the opinion of another. It was impossible for me to confide in you. Even at that time, I felt apprehensive for you. I was well persuaded that you were already too much wrapped up in the very subject in question to permit of my exciting you further, and I think the event has proved that I was right."

"Not so, Mr. Glendell," sighed I: "if you had but told me what you guessed, I might have spared myself, it seems, that visit to the sunken ship, which you tell me, and I may well believe, has been so nearly my death-warrant."

"Well, no, not exactly," returned the doctor, somewhat less confidently. "I am bound to say that that diving affair of yours was well conceived enough. If I had taken you away, for instance, to town, as I intended, we should have obtained neither secret nor——"

"Nor what?" enquired I excitedly.

"Never you mind what, at present," replied the little doctor with an affectation of surliness.—"And don't *you* tell him, Miss Rosa, neither. Let me narrate matters my

own way. Interrupt me again, and I'll order him to bed and water-gruel.—Well, on that night of storm, when you lay at our house here, I rode over—as the next morning I by accident betrayed to you — to Seaview Cottage, where Mrs. Blunt and the lawyer and I laid our three heads together. What we had got to go upon was my late discovery, supplemented by all those slighter indications of the matter, which had now a new significance. You remember how your poor uncle used to call that poor unhappy Hindu *A Perfect Treasure*—how he said he would rather lose ten thousand pounds than Sangaree Tannajee ; and how his true value would only be discovered after his death. Those mysterious words now became intelligible. Again, do you remember that poor white-brown fellow's habit of patting himself in a significant manner when angry with his master, and that that absurd action always produced its effect upon your uncle ? ”

“ I do.”

“ Well, even this became of vital importance in our investigations ; as likewise a circumstance which had come under my own notice, and was apparently wholly unimportant—namely, that the Hindu had suffered dreadfully from dyspepsia, worse, even, than his habits of opium-eating, and laudanum-drinking, and consumption of all sorts of spirituous liquors had deserved. He was more

like a man who had some foreign body within him, to which his system could not assimilate itself."

"Oh, I think I see it!" cried I suddenly.

"The devil you do!" said the little doctor, looking about him. "Where?"

"I mean the secret."

"So did Mr. Moulden: he expressed his opinion that it was something on the liver; and he was wrong. 'To judge by the poor fellow's behaviour,' then said he, 'it ought to have been the spleen that was affected;' but it was not that.—'Now, Mrs. Eleanor Blunt,' said I, 'do you guess; and let me see whether you are the genius I have heard you described. What was the matter with the Hindu, do you imagine, and why should his value only be discovered after death? 'Perhaps,' said she, 'although ugly, he bears, like the toad, a precious jewel in his—' 'Yes, in his inside, Ma am,' exclaimed I. 'You're right;' and I felt as if I could have hugged that sagacious woman to my breast. Fancy, Marmy; without the clue that I held, she had actually guessed the secret!"

I was about to express my doubts of this, but Rosa signed to me to be silent. She saw that her father, who was by no means a great reader, had not understood Mrs. Blunt's remark to be a quotation, and was giving her credit for an almost preternatural sagacity. Of course

I remained silent; indeed, for my part, I thought it just as well that my future father-in-law (as I hoped he would be) should entertain so high a respect for one who had a genuine regard for me.

“Well, this was what was printed on the page of your uncle’s book, and underlined and finger-marked, as though some constant reference had been made to it by the owner, doubtless to reassure himself by the consideration of a parallel case, that such a thing could be——”

“But I never saw that book in my life,” interrupted I, pointing to the volume from which Mr. Glendell was about to read.

“I dare say not, though your uncle looked into it often enough, I’ll answer for it. It was always kept in his desk.—Now, listen to this.—‘The Sancy Diamond ($53\frac{1}{2}$ carats) was found on the body of the Duke of Burgundy after the battle in which he was slain, and bought in 1749 by the King of Portugal. In 1789, it was sold to the Baron de Sancy, from whom it derives its name. Sancy sent it as a present to the King of France, *by the hands of a servant, who, being attacked by robbers, swallowed the stone, which, after death, was found many years afterwards in his body.*’—The light breaks in upon us now, I think, observed the doctor exultingly. “Even Mr. Moulden guessed what had happened when we had got so far. No wonder that un-

fortunate Hindu was dyspeptic, and patted himself when displeased, as much as to say, if you don't put up with all my whims and tempers I'm off with this jewel of yours, which I am carrying about with me *just here*."

"And how do you know it was just there?" enquired I.

"Oh, well, I suppose it was," replied Mr. Glendell, looking very confused. "I am an anatomist by trade, you know, and that's the only place where he could have carried it. If it had lodged in the trachea, it would have made him much more uncomfortable."

"But how on earth came he to swallow it at all?" mused I.

"Well, I confess that is beyond my powers to arrive at," said the surgeon, rubbing his hands. "I think we did pretty well, Mrs. Blunt and I, in arriving at the conclusion we did, and which I'll go bail that lawyer fellow, sharp as he thinks himself, would never have hit upon. No, for that part of the story we look to you, Marmy, and to what lies under that sealskin cover."

"But why did you not tell me this before?" said I. "For then you would have spared me, what, with all its horror, has now turned out to be a bootless errand. By-the-bye," said I abruptly, with as much carelessness as I could assume, though my fingers trembled so with agitation that they could scarcely retain their hold upon the packet,

"I suppose that sloop with the divers has long left the bay?"

Mr. Glendell and Rosa interchanged a meaning look, as the former replied : "Yes, indeed ; weeks ago, its task was completed ; the wreck broke up about three days after you visited it. The men were, however, very successful, and recovered the whole of the bullion.—You are very pale, Marmy.—Rosa, dear, leave us alone for a little, until I give you a call."

The young girl left the room with her usual obedience, but not, I thought, without a reproachful look at her father.

Then the surgeon poured me out a glass of wine, which I swallowed greedily, and drawing his chair close to mine, he took my hand.

"I am not going to torture you any more, lad ; I have got good news for you, the best of news, though Rosa does not know it. She has been telegraphing to me a dozen times not to pursue a subject which she deems must be to you one of unmitigated pain and disappointment. Of course you feel it to be so. When you asked that question as to whether the divers were still here, it was easy to see what you had got in your mind. Well, endeavour to dismiss all your anxiety, and to trust to the word of an honest man when he says 'all's well that ends

well.' Good. Then if you will be kind enough to read what your poor uncle left behind him—which is no Secret now—I will finish my story afterwards. Then all things will be in their right sequence."

I unfastened the string that was about the packet, which had still the impression of my uncle's seal upon it unbroken. Within it was a little scroll of yellow parchment, on which were written, in his handwriting, the following words :

CHUDDLEPORE, *January 4.* (Here followed a date of thirty years back.) *It is now a fortnight ago since we came in safety across the frontier from Bundelbad. We had to cut our way through Her Highness's troopers. I had intrusted Sangaree Tannajee with all my jewels, including the large diamond called Light of the Crown, which the Begum gave me on our marriage. This alone was missing. He at first said it was lost; but on my seizing him, and taxing him with the theft, he acknowledged to having swallowed it. This is to certify that that jewel is my property. I have spared the Hindu's life upon his solemn promise never to leave my service, nor marry, nor in any way to alienate this possession from myself and my heirs.*

Then followed in less pale ink a recent date, and the words : *I give and bequeath [my poor uncle had as crude*

notions of will-making as I had myself] *the diamond called Light of the Crown, after the death of its present unlawful possessor, to my dear nephew, Marmaduke Drake.*

THEOPHILUS BRAYDON.

“And do you mean to say, Mr. Glendell,” enquired I with a beating heart, “that this jewel is not lost to me and mine for ever?”

“I mean to say that it is here,” exclaimed my companion triumphantly; and he produced from his pocket one of those jewellers’ boxes, lined with satin, that are the cradles of all dainty jewels, and in which reposed a magnificent diamond, which he made to sparkle as he turned it this way and that way in the sun.

“Now for my part of the story,” said the doctor importantly, while I sat staring at the living gem, not certain whether I was awake or dreaming. “The reason why I did not tell you of our discovery of your uncle’s secret was simply because I thought it would have driven you mad. You had already evinced signs enough of the illness that was impending over you, and which any further anxiety of mind would have precipitated at once. If you had been told, for instance, that any day the sea might throw up on this very shore, not only the secret on which you were so passionately set, but even the

wealth which your uncle had promised you should one day possess, it would have set your very brain on fire. Even I myself was greatly excited, and at once (though I accounted otherwise for it to you) placed such a reward on the finding of the Hindu's body as would insure its being taken care of, and yet not awaken any suspicion of its great value. Then, when all hope of the bodies from the lost ship being cast ashore had failed, I strove—in hopes to avert that very calamity which afterwards befell you—to persuade you to leave the neighbourhood. At that time, of course, I knew nothing of the diving operations which were so soon to take place, but I left Her-shell fully expecting to be recalled to doctor you ; and so far my judgment was correct. When the summons arrived, Rosa and I at once came home, and have tended you ever since ; and I may now say that you have had the very narrowest shave. But there, you are getting on famously now, thank Heaven ; so we'll say no more of that.”

I squeezed the good surgeon's hand, for well I knew that I had to thank him, next to Heaven, for my life.

“We heard, of course,” continued Mr. Glendell, “of your foolhardy expedition, Marmy, into Davy's Locker ; and, indeed, your companion the diver told us all about it himself. You could not have had a more anxious enquirer

during your illness than he ; while the way in which he eulogised what he called your ‘pluck’ was forcible beyond my power to render. It was to this true friend of yours that I confided that it was most important to your interests that the body of the Hindu should be recovered from the wreck ; and although he refused to oblige me in that respect himself, on account of some superstitious scruple which he entertained against meddling with the drowned, he got his mate (who had arrived in the meantime on board the sloop) to undertake the matter, for a consideration, ample, indeed, yet not one-half per cent. of your gain. To him and the rest we gave out, as before, that you wished to place the Hindu’s remains beside those of his master. And, eventually, this was done. Only you see, Marmy”—and here the surgeon winked in a very sagacious manner—“I did not feel quite satisfied in my mind as to *the cause of death*. I am the last man in my profession to approve of anything like body-snatching ; but the scientific investigation of physical phenomena is quite another thing.—Well, I see you do not sympathise with my views, though I do assure you the case was of the greatest and most peculiar interest, quite independent of—— There, there ; take another glass of wine.— Well, *I got the diamond*; and nobody is any the wiser.”

“What! do you mean to say that nobody knows of it?”

"Hush ! Not a soul—of course not. I had no sort of business to anatomise the poor fellow, and I should get into a most unpleasant row if it were discovered. It was for your sake, my young friend, remember ; so you must keep it quiet too."

"Yes, indeed," said I warmly ; "and I shall never forget the obligation.—But do you mean to say that you have said nothing of my good-fortune even to Rosa ?"

The surgeon looked very grave. "No, Marmaduke ; I have not. This diamond of yours is very, very valuable. When your uncle hinted he would not lose it for ten thousand pounds, he did not exaggerate its worth. Those accounts over which you saw me poring the other day were the estimates of the different jewellers to whom it was submitted for valuation, for I thought I would save you all that trouble."

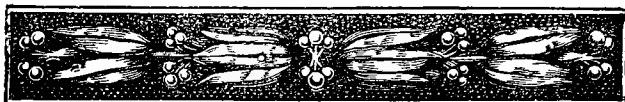
"But not to tell dear Rosa !" reiterated I—"that seems so cruel."

"Well, you see, Marmy," said the doctor hesitatingly, "I like you much, and have always had a good opinion of you ; but circumstances have great power, and often change folk's views. To a poor man, as you used to be, a match with my daughter might have seemed to you an agreeable prospect enough ; but now that you are a man of fortune——"

“Mr. Glendell,” cried I reproachfully, as I strove to rise from my chair, but fell back again through utter weakness, “you surely never thought that of me?”

“No, Marmy,” said he kindly; “I did not think it: but still, such a change was within the bounds of possibility, and I did not wish Rosa to—to perhaps suffer disappointment. We might have made up a little story together, and contrived a separation, and a coldness, and gradually disentangled her affections (which are more closely knit in you, Marmy, as I have found out since your illness, than I had the least idea of); but to know that you had become rich, and therefore deserted her, would, I verily believe, have broken my darling’s heart.—There, now; don’t excite yourself; I see you are far from strong yet: and I’ll just send you in something nice and comforting to soothe you.”

Then, as I sat alone in a golden haze of wonder, yet full of bliss and gratitude, the good doctor brought me in the prescription very neatly made up, and looking very likely to do me good—for it was Rosa herself.



CHAPTER XXI.

LAST WORDS.

AFTER the maiden of our love is won, the remainder of life is said to be a bathos. If it had been so with us, Fate would have dealt hard measure indeed, since we were, even yet, scarcely more than boy and girl. But, indeed, life had but just begun. I can truly say, that bright as my boyhood was, my manhood was brighter still, since Rosa shone upon it. As years went on, Hershell Point was no longer lonely, but echoed to the laugh of those little ones, without whom to lisp in our glad ears the name of Father, existence is indeed incomplete. Mrs. Eleanor Blunt was godmother to our first-born—Theo ; but the number of her days was almost filled. She did not live long enough to allow of his loving her for her own sake ; although I trust he

cherishes the memory of her who was so excellent a friend to both his parents. When she departed, I obeyed her wish, that I should see the world ; and although we always spend the summer at the Point, in the winter we live in the Great Babylon. I have made many ventures in literature since the days of *Brigadoon*, and, without much fear of the charge of self-conceit, I may add more fortunate ones ; but no other has ever filled me with half the pride and joy of that first essay. I look back upon the period of my existence when all my world was not more numerous than Noah's, as upon another life, a previous state of being, from which my present days stand wholly apart, except for that unseen bridge which Memory builds up out of Love, and Gratitude, and Regret, to stand all shocks of Time. What a little round of life it was, and yet how perfect ! The circle has expanded widely enough since then, and yet I move less freely. As for the romance of the world, I have had my share of what is called such ; but for excitement, and anxiety, and peril, nothing I have since experienced has approached that great adventure of my early manhood, when I went down beneath the sea to pluck the secret from a dead man's breast, and found him in truth what well-beloved Uncle Theo had always said he was, A PERFECT TREASURE.



OUR SPARE ROOM.

WHEN Mivins and myself first began life as a married couple, there was nothing upon which we prided ourselves more in our nice little house in Vandeleur Terrace than upon its Spare Room. Every apartment in that modest mansion was dear to us, and had cost me many a tear. Mivins had left the furnishing of it to me from the very first, and nobody can tell, who has not experienced it, what a trial *that* is. What a responsibility is druggets and bed-furniture, and dining-tables and easy-chairs, and gilt mirrors, which you must have, if a house is to be a house, and chandeliers which need a bag to put them into, if they are to bear looking at after the first week, down to the rolling-towel in the back-kitchen, which — talk of the excellence of

machinery in these days!—either does not roll, nine days out of ten, or else comes down with a run.

However, as I say, we furnished our house, and especially that Spare Room. It had statues on the mantelpiece, although it was but a bed-room, and a picture of the Battle of Waterloo, two feet by three, and a fly-catcher, and a sofa, with an antimacassar which Grandmamma Grueby worked herself, and took three and a half years about it, off and on, in expectation of my marriage-day. Moreover, the bed shut up, and didn't look like a bed unless you knew; and there was a wooden cap that fitted over the washing-table: so that altogether when a party had got up, and the place was put in order, you might have enquired whether it wasn't the drawing-room. If matters had turned out different, this might have been the nursery, perhaps, but that was not to be, and our Spare Room it was, and is, and in all probability will remain so long as we stop in Vandeleur Terrace, and we have a lease of the house for ninety-nine years, I believe. However, of course, when we took the place we could not tell what might happen, and it was of no use hiring a house only just big enough for ourselves and no more, and so that's how we came to have our Spare Room. We are not rich people, Mivins and I; but we are in what one may call easy circumstances; that is, we should be so,

if it were not for that extra chamber, which, for my part, and although it does look so spruce and elegant, I wish were walled up, or thrown into the dining-room (as it might be, only that they say the doing away with the party-wall would bring down the house), for really the trouble it has cost me, and the expense it has been to poor dear Mivins, nobody knows.

What I should be most particular about in the way of advice to all young people setting up housekeeping, and especially in town, is this : Whatever house you take, my young friends, whether big or little, be sure you have no such thing as a Spare Room. If you must look out for contingencies—and nothing's worse, as far as my experience goes, or so likely to prove disappointing—and provide an apartment *in advance*, as it were, at least don't furnish it. Then you can say to all friends from the country who write to say they are coming through town — always “through,” even if they stop a week—that you would be above all things delighted to receive them, only you have no extra sleeping accommodation whatever. Of course, they will reply that anything will do for them ; that you may litter them down where you please : that they know how to rough it, and only require that welcome which they are well aware they will receive at your hands, &c. The variety of ingenious self-invitations which

these good people give themselves is most extraordinary. But to all of them you can reply, with truth, that it is a thousand pities, but you have no Spare Room. Ah, happy pair, who have received a hint to this effect while there was yet time, and profited by it! There is a bachelor of my acquaintance who has adopted this course in respect to his drawing-room ; it is a very beautiful apartment, but entirely unfurnished, with the trifling exception of a wreath of plaster-flowers on the ceiling, above the place where the chandelier is expected to hang. He entertains his unmarried friends, and smokes in all his rooms indifferently ; but when he is called upon by ladies, he takes them into the drawing-room, and remarks : “ When I marry, this shall be furnished exactly as the lady of my choice shall direct, who, indeed, shall also have her way in every other particular.” It is extraordinary how respected that man is in domestic circles, although he has not the most distant intention of marriage, and would not exchange the privilege of smoking in his bed-room (as he had once the indelicacy to confide to me) for five-and-forty wives. There is, therefore, nothing more advantageous and cheaper than an unfurnished room ; while to married persons of small income it is indispensable. If they once furnish their Spare Room, it is all over with them ; their house is made a hotel of at once.

"Knowing you have a Spare Room," writes Aunt Bertha, "I make no apology for craving your hospitality for a few days. The May Meetings begin at Exeter Hall on the 14th, and I would not miss that dear good man, Mr. Howler, upon any account; it is uncertain when his address will be delivered, but perhaps Mr. Mivins will be so good as to procure me this information." Aunt Bertha does not think much of poor dear Mivins in his spiritual character, although she never dares breathe so much to me, who know his real worth, and what a genuine good creature, without one halfpenny worth of cant, he is; but she puts great faith in his information regarding everything metropolitan, ever since he once put her into a 'bus which dropped her at the very door of Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle. It is a very difficult matter for my husband, who is only concerned with City matters, to find out about Mr. Howler, whose name he has never heard in his life; but this is the least of the evils Aunt Bertha's coming occasions us. The house is placed under religious martial law for a week certain, and the servants unanimously give us warning after the first twelve hours of her.

Then my Cousin Dick informs us, by letter, that he would not stoop to ask a favour of any other persons in the world but ourselves, his character being, as we know, independent to a fault, but that he is very anxious to ex-

hibit a terrier at the Islington dog-show, and feeling sure that we should never forgive his putting up at an inn, why, he will make use of our Spare Room ; and he ventures to say that we have some sort of a kennel for a little dog that can stand in a corner of that apartment, as he dares not let it sleep out of his sight. Dick is certainly a great change after Aunt Bertha ; but, indifferent guest as she was, I can scarcely say he is an improvement. He keeps hours which, except that they are always late, are very uncertain, and is not to be trusted to extinguish the light in the lobby, nor even to put the chain up, after he has got in—when he *does* get in, a feat which he sometimes finds a little difficult. I don't mean to say he gets tipsy ; but he is so unused to latch-keys, that he will fumble for half-an-hour at the front-door—while Mivins and I lie terrified with the idea that it is burglars. The last time this occurred, we felt the more certain of this, inasmuch that after about a quarter of a hour the noise altogether ceased, and long afterwards our belated guest let himself in quite easily.

At breakfast, however, he explained the circumstance, very much to his own satisfaction.

"I may not be clever," said Dick : "but I do think I am sagacious. You would not have imagined now, Mivins, how the simple habit of observation alone preserved me

from passing last night in the streets. I arrived at your hospitable door at about 12.15, and it utterly refused to open——”

“Then it was you, Dick, was it,” interrupted I indignantly, “who kept us awake for hours scrabbling at the keyhole?”

“Yes, it was me,” replied Dick coolly; “and I must say, cousin, that if you heard my frantic efforts to obtain admittance, you might have sent Mivins down to let a fellow in.”

“But we thought it was thieves,” expostulated my husband; “and besides, there was that horrid dog of yours in the Spare Room, which you told me yourself, when it once got hold of a man’s leg, would never let go.”

“That is very true,” replied Dick proudly. “A hot poker put close to his nose would be the sole method of persuading him to part company, and I suppose such an instrument could not have been procured at that late hour. However, it was I who was at the door; and the latch-key which I had carried so carefully in my waistcoat pocket had got itself stuffed up with a fluey substance, and the harder I poked it into the keyhole, the harder that obstruction became. Perhaps it was a little later than 12.15——”

"It was half-past two, Dick," remarked I parenthetically.

"Was it really, cousin? How wonderfully quick the time does pass in London! Well, at all events, there was nobody to be seen or heard. Vandeleur Terrace was as silent as our farm-yard in the country before cock-crow, and I could hear myself apostrophising that latch-key as plainly as though I was in our wall-garden with the echo. I whistled down the barrel of it, but I might just as well have whistled for a wind. I knelt down and knocked it against the door-step, but I might as well have tried to make a rabbit bolt by jumping on the mouth of its burrow. If I'd only had a scarf-pin, I could have picked the thing clean in half a minute, but then my scarf-pin had been stolen about two hours before by a very gentlemanly person who had asked me the way to St. Paul's Churchyard. Then all of a sudden I remembered that, three streets off or so, I had seen a solitary policeman amusing himself with a—no, not with a toothpick, but with a pin instead of a toothpick."

"Dick," said I, "don't be vulgar."

"Certainly not, cousin," said he.—"I had reflected upon passing him that it was an ungenteel occupation, but had forbore to make any remonstrance, on account of his having nothing else to do. Now I blessed my stars

that I had not made him my enemy by any such rebuke. Threading my way carefully back, I found him at the exact spot where I had left him, and engaged in the same occupation.

“‘Policeman,’ said I, ‘my latch-key is stuffed up, have you got such a thing as a pin?’ for I thought that any more direct reference to the instrument so obviously in his possession might be considered offensive.”

“‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I have got half a dozen;’ and he exhibited a seam of his coat quite studded with those articles. Without entering into the very interesting question of why he carried so many pins, I selected one of them, and having removed the obstacle that prevented me from enjoying your hospitality, I thanked him, and returned it to him in company with a shilling. But for my habit of observation, you see, I might have remained out of doors all night; for nothing would have induced me to have called you up, my character being, as you know, independent to a fault.”

Dick never occupied our Spare Room again; we had had enough of his habit of observation and independence of character, as well as of Aunt Bertha’s spiritual despotism. We did not indeed sell off the furniture of that unfortunate apartment which was always leading us into so much trouble and expense; but we did a bolder

thing still—we invited Uncle Trotter to come and live with us.

Uncle Trotter was perhaps one of the most disagreeable persons alive, and was very sincerely abhorred by every member of his family, as well as by his relations by marriage, including Mivins himself; but at the same time he was greatly respected and caressed. His wealth was said to be untold, and his constitution was thought to be not worth a year's purchase. This latter notion was altogether delusive, for various members of the family had already welcomed him to their hearths and homes, and he had lived with them *gratis* for considerable periods, only to leave them, not in a hearse, but in a huff, for some other rival relative, whose speculation was doomed in its turn to turn out quite as unfortunately. Besides his own intrinsic demerits, there was this additional disadvantage in entertaining the old gentleman, that it placed you at daggers drawn with everybody else who had any expectations from him. "See how those crafty Mivinses have got hold of dear Uncle Trotter," was the general remark in the family, I know, directly he came to Vandeleur Terrace; and this feeling was especially fomented by our cousin Graspalls, from whom we bore him away almost at his last gasp, as they affirmed, and just when they were about to reap, as they imagined, in his

will, the harvest of many months of servility and inconvenient hypocrisy. He came to us, however, immediately upon our invitation, without repaying them a shilling for all the expense that he had been to them, and with a number of handsome presents that these miserable people had bestowed upon him at different times unknown to one another. Costly gifts from the old Graspalls, which it must have made their hearts ache to purchase ; a walking-stick with a gold handle from the elder son ; a snuff-box from the younger ; a Wordsworth elegantly bound (a pig would have been better pleased with a pearl) from one of the young ladies ; and even a box of pills, "with a pious hope that they would do dearest uncle good," from the very smallest Graspall. What I disliked most in the old gentleman was his chuckling over these presents, and turning into ridicule their unfortunate donors ; but besides his behaviour in this respect, Uncle Trotter was quite unbearable. In the first place, his habits were so unpleasant that, rather than have him live with us, I would have preferred that Cousin Dick's terrier should have occupied our Spare Room for a permanency, and even brought up there that family of puppies of whose arrival I was in agonised expectation throughout her stay. Then the trouble he gave was something incredible ; the Spare Room bell was always ringing, and meals being eaten

there at all hours except those at which the rest of the household were accustomed to take them. He smoked unceasingly, too, and upon one occasion threatened to light his pipe with the flycatcher, because lucifers were brought to him for that purpose in place of wax-lights. An angel in the house, as a life-boarder, would, I believe, be unpleasant to any married woman like myself ; spinsters may and do tolerate volunteer companions under the same roof, but with us it is different ; home is not home unless, for some portion of the year at least, we enjoy it, Darby-and-Joan fashion, with our husbands. Moreover, as I have hinted, Uncle Trotter was not an angel, but rather the reverse. He left us, summarily, after a domestic fracas, the news of which delighted all the family, both those who had lodged and boarded him, and those who hoped to lodge and board him. He removed from our roof to that of the Limpets, who had long been looking out for that happy chance. They were even so fortunate as to be the last whom Uncle Trotter visited ; and they received his last sigh. He had nothing else to give them, as it turned out, for he had sunk the whole of his property in a Life Annuity.

Our Spare Room was now once more in our hands, and began to invite our dear friends from the country like an inn signboard at election-time. Then Mivins

and I determined upon a line of defence that should be impregnable ; we came to the resolution to let Lodgings to Single Gentlemen. This was inconvenient, but so, probably, is the shell of the tortoise ; it was undignified, but so is digging a rifle-pit in the presence of an enemy ; it had, however, the advantage of insuring safety. It was a conclusive reply to all persons inviting themselves to No. 1 Vandeleur Terrace, that “circumstances over which we had no control,” (and I never wrote a truer sentence) “had compelled us to let our Spare Room.” Then I took counsel with my old friend, Mrs. Brown, of the Edgware Road—Lucy Gill as was when I was Martha Trivet—who, being in reduced circumstances, had commenced the “Furnished Apartment” business two or three years ago, and after several misadventures, pertaining, I suppose, to all commencements, was succeeding in it to a marvel. Success was not so much *our* object, as security ; we wanted a lodger, not as a means of livelihood, but simply as a garrison. There was therefore very little doubt that we should be easily suited.

“But don’t take very young gentlemen,” said Mrs. Brown, “for such are often in hiding from their relatives, and their relatives sometimes refuse to settle their bills upon their restoration to the domestic circle ; and don’t

take very old gentlemen, for they sometimes decease in the house, and there is a difficulty in getting the parish to bury them."

This advice seemed rather hard in Lucy (whom I remember all heart, or nearly so), but it was sound, so far as it went, and founded upon practical experience.

So we took the first middle-aged gentleman — Mr. Adolphus Conroy—who rang the front-door bell with an eye to our Spare Room. The apartment pleased him, the terms pleased him, my offer to cater for him pleased him, and, in short, he expressed himself—and in very appropriate terms—as satisfied with everything. After Uncle Trotter, almost any inmate would have made a favourable impression, but Mr. Conroy was really a pattern lodger. He was a little “high” in his manner to me, but then how could he know that I was not dependent upon his custom, like other landladies? Doubtless, thought I, he regards me as a harpy who will burn his coals and drink his tea, and lay the decrease of his butcher’s meat to the account of the cat; so I was patient with his supercilious ways. He was really very nice-looking; he had, I must say, an aristocratic air about him very different from Mivins—who, however, is worth all the aristocrats in the world: his

luggage was of great bulk, and very heavy ; altogether, he was a sort of lodger one couldn't well help looking up to. His mode of life was all that could be desired. At about eleven A.M., he left the house, attired in the first style of fashion, and returned at seven to his dinner ; after which he would smoke a couple of pipes, and then retire for the night. He never made a complaint of any sort, nor any observation upon the weekly bills save one — that they were *ridiculously cheap*. “Really, Mrs. Mivins,” observed he, at the end of the second week, “I cannot think how you manage ; I couldn't keep myself upon twice the money. You must really give me your receipt for such economy.” But he never asked me for my receipt for his account, because he never paid it. That was the one drawback with respect to my otherwise model lodger ; he never offered to pay one six-pence either for board or lodging. Being of a sensitive disposition, and unaccustomed to my new calling, I did not like to press for a settlement ; but after the third week had passed without my receiving any remuneration for a good deal of trouble and some considerable expenses—for gin-punch with lemon was what he took of an evening, and lemons are dear—I thought I'd go and see my professional adviser, Mrs. Brown.

“What !” says she, when I had confided to her my
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little difficulty, "you haven't seen the colour of this fellow's money for three weeks?"

Fancy her speaking of Mr. Adolphus Conroy as "a fellow!" but a hard life makes one use hard words, I suppose: poor Lucy!

"No," returned I; "I have not. But then he says that little sums are so embarrassing, and that he would rather settle at the month's end."

"Did he say that?" cried Mrs. Brown, in a state of great excitement. "Oh the wretch! Oh the base deceiver! Does he speak with a lisp, this Mr. Conroy? does he call little sums, little thumbs? Pray, tell me, for I'm all in a twitter."

"Well," said I, "I'm sure I can't tell how you guessed it, Lucy, but certainly he has that peculiarity. Many persons of good condition have it, you know."

"I'll condition him," cried Lucy. "I'll let him know that he sha'n't rob my helpless babes with impunity. That very man—I'm sure it's he—lodged with me just when I set up business in the letting line. His name was Somers then; but he had that same excuse about settling at the month's end.—Jemima Anne, go and fetch a policeman."

The child thus addressed was about to start off delighted on this errand, but I set my back against the

door. "Lucy Brown," exclaimed I, "this shall not be. You may be all wrong from first to last. Now, the way to find out for certain will be this: do you and Mr. Brown come and take tea with us this very evening, and then you shall look through the keyhole of our Spare Room, and see whether our lodger is the same as your Mr. Somers."

"Which if he is, I'll baste him," observed Lucy, taking up a hearth-brush, and looking more formidable than I should ever have given her credit for. I had never believed any of those stories about Mrs. Brown's complete subjugation of her husband until then. He was once a sergeant-major in the army, and stands six feet three in his stocking-feet: still the power of a woman's eye is, I believe, almost inconceivable—although it was never necessary for me to use it with Mivins.

Well, they came—these two—to Vandeleur Terrace; and before we sat down to tea, what do you think?—I observed that there was something odd about Mrs. Brown's dress, although crinoline does hide most things—she actually had that hearth-brush stuck through her pocket!

The law wouldn't right her, she said, so she was determined to right herself with the strong hand, in case my lodger was the man she anticipated. The ser-

geant-major was to stand in the passage, and see that the victim made no resistance. I thought this a most dreadful proposition, and insisted upon no such thing taking place in my house : but Mivins, I am sorry to say, opposed me point-blank. He even suggested that I, who had been wronged also by this gentleman, should assist Mrs. Brown, while he himself assisted the sergeant-major in overawing the foe. I wonder what Aunt Bertha would have said had she heard him make such a proposal ! How earnestly I hoped that my lodger would not come in that evening, would never come back at all ; or better still, that he would turn out to be the Mr. Adolphus Conroy which his manners and appearance had always led me to expect ; the personal description which Mrs. Brown had given of Mr. Somers, tallying so accurately with his own, however, that this last hope was very faint indeed.

At 6.45, as usual, the unsuspecting man came home, and we could scarcely prevent the avenging female on the first floor from descending upon him forthwith, when she recognised his voice and step. The sergeant-major, however, represented to her how much sweeter her revenge would be if she waited till he had his slippers on, and his pipe alight, and he had made himself, as he fondly imagined, comfortable for the evening ; so poor

Mr. Adolphus Conroy dined in peace. At eight P.M., the sergeant-major and my husband softly descended into the passage, and stood the one on one side, the other on the other of our Spare Room door. I remained on the stairs, with my heart going pit-a-pat, I can promise you, and wishing what was coming was well over. The intrepid Lucy stooped down, and looked through the key-hole.

“It’s Somers,” observed she, in a voice trembling with anticipated triumph; “it’s the very man himself. He’s got his horrid feet upon the mantelshelf, just as he used to do in our house; and he’s reading the same volume of Byron’s poems. I’ll *Don Juan* him.”

With these words, she threw open the door, and marched into our Spare Room, like a general taking possession.

“And how do you *do*, Mr. Somers, *alias* Mr. Adolphus Conroy, *alias* a number of other fine names, I do not doubt? My ’umble duty to you, my perfect gentleman;” and she dropped her courtesy to him with the most cutting courtesy you can imagine. I could not help coming a little way down the stairs to look at him. I never saw any man so frightened in my life: Mivins, under the idea of burglars, was quite a Julius Cæsar compared with him. His eye wandered irresolutely from the

hearth-brush to the sergeant-major, and lit upon me at last with really quite a pitiful expression.

“Oh, Mrs. Mivins,” said he, “I never meant *you* any harm. Do, pray, protect me.”

“Oh, no harm at all,” exclaimed my husband, presenting our little account carefully made up to the latest dates—“no harm at all, if you will settle that.”

“And *this*,” added Mrs. Brown, dropping another courtesy, and drawing forth a document of a similar nature.

“I have not got one single farthing,” observed Mr. Adolphus Conroy with desperation.

I draw a veil over what followed; indeed, I was so upset that I became entirely unconscious. When I recovered, the sentinels were still at their post; Mrs. Brown’s colour was rather heightened; her hearth-brush was broken in two; my unfortunate lodger was sitting on the carpet of our Spare Room in a supplicatory attitude.

“If you will only spare me, dear Mrs. Brown,” cried he; “I have an uncle in town who will repay you all, and more.”

“I dare say you have,” replied she contemptuously. “You have an uncle in every street.”

“Yes, but this is a regular one, this is,” urged

he ; “and he’s very fond of his nephew, I do assure you.”

“Then he must have a very peculiar taste,” quoth the sergeant-major sententiously.

“He will pay you all ten times over,” cried the poor wretch, rubbing his back. “I don’t ask you to lose sight of me. Come with me to his house, Mrs. Brown, if you will not trust me.”

“*Trust* you !” exclaimed that lady with the loftiest scorn. Nevertheless, since there was offered this scintilla of hope, she put on her bonnet, and accompanied her victim into the street, notwithstanding the sergeant-major’s remonstrances. In about five minutes she returned alone ; Mr. Somers, *alias* Conroy, had called a cab in the next street, and escaped from the avenger. “*He got on the box,*” said she, “or I would have gone with him wherever he went. However, he’s had something to remember me by.”

When we came to examine the bulky and ponderous baggage, it turned out to be brickbats. All that he had left of personal property in our Spare Room—he having taken away all his fine clothes by degrees and unobserved—was a false cravat, called, I believe, a “Dundreary,” and a little box full of ingenious instruments for forcing locks.

The misfortune has put us rather out of heart in respect to single-gentlemen lodgers.

Can anyone tell us what is to be done with our Spare Room?





SOME RAILWAY ADVENTURES.

“**P**OSESSION,” says the proverb, if it be a proverb—for it may be a legal dictum laid down since the celebrated case of *Orange v. Stuart*, for all that I know—“is nine parts of the law.” It is probable that this expression was originally intended only to apply to property, landed or funded, but it has since obtained a much more general signification. It has especially become the motto of those who travel in public conveyances. If A be the first to enter an omnibus calculated (or at least licensed) to carry the entire alphabet, he looks upon the entrance of B as an infringement upon his rights. B, on his part, is so well aware of this, that he enters fawningly, and takes his seat in a deprecatory manner, or sticks his hat awry, and looks as reckless of all consequences as a pirate boarding a gentleman’s yacht.

His conscience tells him that he is intruding, and he behaves with humility or insolence as his nature is mild or bold. But as soon as C is seen gesticulating to the conductor, and the machine begins to slacken speed, A and B tacitly conclude a treaty, and gaze upon the new arrival with a common astonishment at his excessive impertinence. They survey him from his hat to his boots with the loftiest superciliousness, and exchange glances of contemptuous pity at the state of his umbrella. You would suppose that they would never endure his companionship, far less enter into an alliance with that interloper, no matter how many revolving ages should elapse ; nor would they, perhaps, if it was not for D, who takes his seat in the presence of a triumvirate of brothers, who scowl upon him as though they were the Council of Three in judgment upon a conspirator.

This, too, is always more or less the case with railway passengers. There is an insane conviction in the minds of most men who get into an empty railway carriage, that that carriage is theirs, and if anybody attempts to share it with them, their countenance and manner express abundantly enough their sense of the intrusion.* This is

* I here refer, of course, to the first class only, for it can scarcely be the passengers by the other classes, who are accustomed to journey very much as figs do in a drum, and would probably break, like the earthenware (which in the company's eyes they are), if they travelled without close packing.

certainly independent of any desire to be alone for the purpose of indulging in the vice of smoking. Clergymen (who, of course, never touch tobacco) are as tenacious of their solitary dignity as guardsmen ; lawyers look as if they carried the deed in their pocket which transferred the vehicle from the company to themselves for their sole use ; the cardsharpener alone is anxious to secure a travelling companion, and smiles blandly out of window at all apparently eligible persons. To walk on a railway platform down a line of carriages about to start, with a Bradshaw in your hand, and a travelling-cap on your head, is to receive a broadside of indignant and repelling glances. The truth of this will, I am sure, be admitted by everybody ; my own personal appearance is engaging in a very exceptional degree, and therefore what I have experienced myself must have been undergone in a more aggravated form by most people. For this reason, among others, I prefer to arrive early at a railway station, so that I may establish myself in the post of vantage, as first-comer, and survey my fellow-creatures with the air, I do not say of an enemy well intrenched, but of a superior, and with an expression, if not of hauteur, of condescension. I was therefore annoyed enough to find myself rather late last Saturday at London Bridge, and the train without a single empty carriage. Receiving, therefore (and, I flatter

myself, returning), looks of hatred and defiance, I walked hastily along the platform, glancing into all the windows for the least crowded compartment, and presently selected one which had only two passengers, neither of whom, strange to say, surveyed me with the customary scorn.

The one was a young divine, with an expression that would have been eminently "gentlemanlike" if it had not been so effeminate as to be almost ladylike: the other looked like a military man (as, indeed, he turned out to be), but had rather a peculiar air of oppression and melancholy. These two did not seem to be acquainted with one another, nor, as I have said, had they even made the usual league together against the invaders of their privacy. While I had myself been looking out for a seat I had observed another man employed in the same search, who seemed to be less easily satisfied: not till the bell rang and the train began to move, did this gentleman make up his mind as to what carriage he would travel in, when he evinced a tardy discernment in making choice of ours. Even then he threw such a suspicious glance around him, as one escaping from his creditors might cast at three possible bailiffs, and cowered into a corner of the carriage, as though he had only purchased the right to half a seat.

My journey did not promise very pleasantly, for, like

the Great Lexicographer, I am fond of talk, and it did not seem probable that I should get it. The officer was silent, the divine was shy, and the last comer gave a terrified start whenever he was addressed. A trifling circumstance, however, gave an impetus to conversation.

At the first station we stopped at, the officer bought a six-penny newspaper, and having no silver, gave the boy half a sovereign, who hurried away to procure change. A considerable time elapsed, the whistle sounded, and we began slowly to move away. Just as we cleared the very end of the platform, however, the lad appeared panting at the window with the nine-and-sixpence. "You have been fortunate, Sir," remarked I smiling: "I had begun to fear that you would lose your money. Your patience under the circumstances testified to your better opinion of human nature."

"Human nature is much vilified," returned the officer gravely; "if we knew it better we should live more happily with our fellow-creatures. As it is, however, we are in reality less suspicious of them than we pretend to be. Not only is Honesty the rule, and Roguery the exception in the world, but there is a much greater amount of confidence between man and man than is generally acknowledged."

"I have heard the same sentiment corroborated," observed I, "from the lips of a great philosopher."

"I have had it confirmed in my own person," replied the officer sighing: "I have experienced an act of trustful kindness from a stranger which will embitter my life to my dying day."

This curious statement was delivered in a tone of such melancholy depth that even the shy young clergyman ventured to glance with astonishment at the speaker, and the gentleman in the corner protruded his head cautiously from his cloak collar, like a tortoise from its shell, in order to listen for more.

"Sir," said I, "if the matter to which you allude demands no secrecy, the narration—I think I may speak for these two gentlemen—would interest us very much. Pray tell us it."

"It is but a short story," said the officer, "and I will gladly narrate it, not only to oblige you, but because the more people who hear it, the less improbable is the chance of getting my misfortune remedied. You must know, then, that until the last four years I was by no means the sombre and reserved person I now appear. I was sprightly and vivacious, and even in the company of strangers accustomed to converse without the least reserve. A morbid desire to establish myself in the good

opinion of everybody impelled me perhaps too much to sociality, and my having given way to this may go far, alas ! to convince a certain individual that I am indeed the villain which he would otherwise have only suspected me to be. If I find my pocket picked upon leaving a railway carriage," observed the officer with energy, "my suspicions naturally fix themselves on the stranger who has manifested the greatest desire to be my friend."

The young divine here flushed all over, like a western cloud at sunset, and cast down his eyes as though he had been himself accused of petty larceny ; while the man in the cloak fumbled at the window, with the intention, as it really seemed, of getting at the door-handle and jumping out.

"I was once travelling on this very line," resumed the officer more calmly, after a little pause, "from the town in which I chanced to be quartered, to London ; and singularly enough the conversation of my fellow-passengers turned, as it has done to-day, upon mutual confidence between man and man. It commenced, I think, with some observations of two mercantile gentlemen upon the credit system, but eventually resolved itself into : What should be done or not done in the case of a stranger asking to borrow money of any one of us. We laughed a good deal at various circumstances and contingencies

which the question suggested, and got to be very friendly. My companions all alighted at various stations, except myself and the gentleman with whom I had been chiefly conversing. As we were nearing the terminus, observing me, I suppose, to search my pockets and suddenly change colour, he enquired: What was the matter, and if I had lost my railway ticket.

“‘No,’ said I, ‘I have got my ticket, nor have I actually lost anything; but I just find out that I have left my purse locked up in the desk in my quarters, and have therefore come away with only a few shillings in my pocket.’

“‘Can I be of any service to you?’ enquired my companion, drawing out his own *porte-monnaie*.

“‘Thank you very much,’ returned I laughing, ‘for the proof of that confidence we were speaking about; but although I am going to a hotel, and it might have been so far inconvenient, I have a banker in London.’

“‘But the bank will be closed by this time,’ urged the gentleman; ‘you had better take a sovereign or two!’

“‘Nay,’ said I; ‘in that case, I will take a five-pound note at once, which can be more easily transmitted by post. This is, however, a practical test of your be-

nevolent principles, which you could scarcely have anticipated to occur so soon. A total stranger ——'

"‘My dear Sir,’ interrupted he with warmth, ‘pray do not mention it. There is no credit to me in the matter, for it is easy to see that you are an officer and a gentleman.’

“Then he purposely changed the conversation with a delicacy which I have since never ceased to regret; for what with talking and laughing, I forgot all about the loan till the train stopped, and we went together to look for our luggage, and in the crowd we were separated without ever wishing each other good-bye, or remembering to exchange our names and addresses. *I* don’t know whither to send the money, or how I shall ever repay him; while he, *I* have no doubt, concludes that he has met with a clever scoundrel, who did him out of a five-pound note. Since that unfortunate hour, I have never passed a happy day, and a journey by railway always makes me especially melancholy. I feel that my honour is tarnished, and that in the eyes of an honest man I am become a swindler. I have advertised again and again, to three times the value of the loan, without result, and while I trust you will make the circumstance known to as many people as possible, I have very little hope that the man I have unwittingly wronged will ever be put in possession of the truth.”

"My dear Sir," exclaimed the clergyman with unexpected boldness, "I feel for you deeply. I remember that in the famous novel *Oliver Twist*, there is no situation more painful than when he is carried away by Sikes with Mr. Brownlow's books in his possession, so that that benevolent gentleman's faith in him is shaken, and the honest lad lies under the imputation of being a thief."

"At the same time," said I, "your innocence, Sir, should at least protect you from the stings of conscience; you have nothing to reproach yourself with but forgetfulness in not having revealed your name. The philosopher of whom I have already spoken owed more money and comforted himself on slighter grounds; but then he had philosophy to console him, for the possession of which indeed he had a European reputation."

"I should very much like to hear his opinion on the matter," observed the officer eagerly.

"At a certain dinner-party, then," said I, "at which the philosopher and myself were present, the conversation turned (as it was very apt to do under his guidance) upon the perfectibility of the human species. Human nature, he contended, was not only capable of perfection, but was already much nearer to it than clergymen and others imagined. There was a beautiful confidence existing in our common nature. Suspicion was only for attorneys

and police detectives. He had had the most satisfactory experience of this throughout a protracted existence, but more especially in his youth. He then proceeded to communicate to us a particular example. ‘In my early manhood I ran away from my stay-at-home friends in Yorkshire, who were ignorant of, and inattentive to, the yearnings of the passionate soul, and disported myself as long as my slender purse permitted in the wilds of Devonshire. When my money was exhausted, I left off that vagabond life, and put up at a respectable hotel. Although I must have looked dirty and travel-stained enough, and had only a knapsack for luggage, no question was put to me as to my solvency, which itself was a charming proof of natural confidence. After passing a week or so in these very comfortable quarters, I sent for the landlord, and expounded to him the circumstances of the case. I told him that I already owed him a considerable sum, but that that was by no means the worst of it (from *my* point of view), for that in addition to this, I had not got a shilling to take me northwards. This good and trustful person—who always seems to me the incarnation of tender faith—not only credited me for the eight pounds or so for which I was already indebted to him, but furnished me with eight more for the expenses of my journey. Now, considering that the name I had given him might have

been assumed, or, if genuine, might have been totally worthless, I consider this to have been a convincing proof of that benevolent confidence, which, I contend, prevails among a large majority of those whom I am pleased to call my fellow-creatures. *I was then seventeen, and now I am seventy-one, and the man has never been paid yet.”*

“What an infamous scoundrel,” exclaimed the officer with indignation.

“Nay, certainly not,” said I; “he would himself have acted precisely as did the hotel-keeper if he had chanced to have been placed in his position. He was one of the most generous and kindly hearted of mankind. Pecuniary obligation was, however, a matter beneath the consideration of his philosophy, which was stupendous and far reaching, but not comprehensive of details.”

“The innkeeper, however,” observed the officer, “was not aware of that.”

“True,” said I; “and yet, you see, how lightly the great man bore that innkeeper’s probable opinion of him. In the wilds of Devonshire he was doubtless mistaken for little better than a swindler.”

“It is a dreadful thing to be mistaken for somebody else,” observed the young clergyman with a sigh.

I was wondering whether the speaker could ever have

been by possibility mistaken for anybody but his own sister, when he proceeded as follows :

"I was once placed in a very uncomfortable position myself, through an error in judgment on the part of a most respectable female. When I was a young man at Cambridge, and even up to the time that I took my degree, I had absolutely no whiskers. [Here he fingered a little mole upon his right cheek, as though he would have said : "Nothing of this leonine appearance that you see in me now."] I was indeed almost effeminate-looking, and some of my foolish college-friends nicknamed me 'Bella,' and 'Bellissima,' which was even more ridiculous still. It was the long vacation, but certain business calling me to the university, I took the train thither from town. At the station I met some Cambridge friends, who were making a shorter journey than I, but of course we got into the same carriage. A rather severe-looking lady, with spectacles, very stout, and not very young, made up our company. She looked a little alarmed at the somewhat fast appearance of my friends when she first entered ; but upon their earnest assurance that they would not smoke nor compel her to take a hand at cards, she grew reassured so far as they were concerned. I shall never forget, however, the look of intense suspicion with which she regarded my unhappy

self. My face had at first been concealed by the newspaper I was reading, but as soon as she caught sight of it, she gave a sort of virtuous shudder. What *had I* done, thought I, to deserve this? I had a trick of colouring at that time [the speaker was purple, and had been so throughout the narration], and I dare say I became a little flushed. ‘Now, Bella, don’t blush,’ exclaimed one of my friends, in allusion to this infirmity; whereupon they both burst out laughing.

“I never before saw anybody look so shocked, and at the same time so indignant, as did the old lady at this. She wore precisely the expression that the great Scotch reformer would have worn, under the circumstances imagined by the poet :

As though you had taken sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna, or Munich,
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the ballet in trousers and tunic.

I shall never forget her. My companions, I believe, were not entirely aware of the hideous notion that had taken possession of her mind, but *I* knew very well. Their calling me ‘Bella’ had changed her suspicion to certainty. She thought I was a female in man’s attire. When they got out at their station with a ‘Good-bye,

Bella,' ‘By bye, Bellissima, till we meet again at the Leger’ (I used to go to races in those days), I fell in a cold perspiration at being left alone with that old woman. I pretended, however, to be deeply interested in *Bell's Life*. I heard some remark which sounded like ‘a pretty paper for a young woman to be reading,’ but I affected not to listen. The situation was dreadful. If she began to upbraid me, what measures should I take to convince her of her scandalous error? Presently, however, she commenced collecting the baskets and parcels, of which she had an infinite number, and I felt to my great relief that she was going to get out at the next station. When she had all her goods about her, and the train was slackening speed, she took up her umbrella, and shaking it in my terrified countenance, exclaimed: ‘Oh, aint you ashamed of yourself, you impudent hussey?’

“‘Madam,’ I replied, with all gentleness, ‘I assure you——’

“‘Don’t speak to me,’ interrupted she; ‘don’t attempt to deceive *me*, girl: I knew you from the first moment I saw you.’

“After getting down from the carriage with some difficulty, she took the trouble to climb up the step again, and put her head into the window with these

words : ‘ I tell you what it is, Miss Bella ; *you’re a disgrace to your sex.*’

“ That was a more distressing railway adventure than even yours,” observed I to the officer.

“ It is the most awful incident that ever occurred to anybody on any railway,” said the young clergyman, wiping from his alabaster forehead the perspiration which had been evoked by these distressing details.

“ It is nothing of the kind, Sir,” observed the man in the corner, emerging suddenly from his retirement ; “ it is but as a cat’s paw of wind to a tornado when compared with the experience that *I* have met with as a traveller. My nerves are shattered, my spirits are broken, I have become the wreck you now behold, in consequence of a single railway adventure.”

“ If you could compose yourself so far as to tell it us,” observed I delicately, “ it would afford us much gratification.”

“ I have a bottle of smelling-salts in my carpet-bag, in case you should feel overcome,” said the young clergyman.

“ And I never travel without this flask of brandy and water,” added the officer, “ which is very much at your service.”

“ Under these circumstances, I will endeavour to gratify you,” resumed the person addressed, “ although the re-

cital of the scene in question always unnerves me. You doubtless observed that I looked in at the window once or twice before I took my seat in this carriage, and that even when I had done so, I regarded you three gentlemen with considerable distrust. Moreover, you may have seen me shudder occasionally at sentiments and actions of yours which may have seemed to you innocent enough. The reason of this is, that I am morbidly apprehensive of finding myself in the company of any person not of sane mind. Once in my life—an occasion I can never forget—I was the fellow-traveller in a railway carriage with a maniac." The narrator here took a prolonged snift at the vinaigrette. "He was a powerful man, and even if he had not been mad, I should have had no chance with him. We were alone together. It was the express train, and of course there were no means of communicating with the guard. Mr. Edgar Poe himself could hardly have imagined a set of circumstances more appalling. Previous to the outbreak, I am bound to say the gentleman conducted himself with propriety. He refused, but with the utmost courteousness, my offer of a *Punch* and the *Times*, and applied himself harmlessly enough, as it seemed, to the study of *Bradshaw*. Whether excessive application to that abstruse volume had been the original cause of his unhappy malady, I do not

know, but the particular frenzy of which I was the miserable victim was certainly excited by that work.

“ ‘Sir,’ observed he, with an air of intellectual languor, ‘can you assist an unhappy scholar to discover the hour at which this train arrives at Madagascar? I am aware that we change carriages at the Equator at 2.48, but beyond that I cannot trace our route.’

“ Then I knew, of course, at once that the man had lost his senses. There was a cold malicious glitter in his eye, notwithstanding his soft speech, which made my hand shake as I took the proffered volume and pretended to look out for Madagascar. To humour him, and to gain time, were my only objects. At what a snail’s pace we seemed to travel! How I envied the country lads that waved their ragged hats in the fields as the train passed by: how gladly would I have changed places with the milkman in the meadow, or the carter with his team, or the policeman standing by the rail-side, with his ‘All Right’ flag up. All right, indeed, and a first-class passenger perhaps about to be torn limb from limb by a madman!

“ ‘Have you discovered Madagascar?’ asked the maniac presently, with great irritation.

“ I was obliged to confess that I had not as yet been so fortunate; I had, however, still to explore the Scotch

railways, and perhaps (said I) it might be somewhere among them.

“ ‘I don’t think it likely,’ observed my companion drily. ‘Do you not observe those thick black lines which cut the way-bill’—he here drew his fingers with frightful energy across his throat—‘just as one thinks one is coming to one’s journey’s end? That is the North Pole. The late lamented Dr. Scoresby chopped it into small pieces for greater convenience. We can never be too thankful for its introduction. Let us drink the health of the North Pole; let us compose an ode to its Low Thermometership. Come, you begin.’

“ At this point, the narrator almost drained the brandy flask in his nervous trepidation. His excitement was communicated to ourselves, and I believe if the train had stopped anywhere during this entralling portion of the story, that each of us would rather have been carried beyond his mark than missed the *dénouement*.

“ ‘Come you begin,’ repeated the madman with a look of extreme ferocity ; “ ‘Roll, roll, North Pole,’ or something of that kind ; but not with your clothes on. How dare you address his Low Thermometership in that unseemly garb.’

“ In a quarter of a minute my companion had divested himself of every article of raiment except his shirt, and I

was doing my best to follow his example. ‘Hasten,’ cried he, ‘insolent minion, for Mad, Madder, Madagascar is drawing nigh.’

“No human beings, I suppose, ever presented a more astounding spectacle than did we two in our airy garments, kneeling upon the floor of that railway carriage, and apostrophising the North Pole. I felt my senses were fast deserting me through excess of terror, and that if the plan which now suggested itself should fail, it would indeed be all over with me.

“‘What!’ exclaimed I, ‘is it possible that you venture to speak to the N. P. without previously putting your head through the carriage window?’

“In an instant he had leaped up, and darted his head and neck through the pane as though it had not been there. The sharp fragments of the glass retained him, so that he could not draw his head back without great pain and difficulty, and in the meantime I had opened the other door, and, at the hazard of my life, clambered into the next carriage, where I found a stout gentleman asleep, who was almost frightened into fits by my unexpected and horrible appearance. He gave me, however, his railway-rug to wrap around me, and I was narrating to him the dreadful events which had just happened, when, lo! there was a scrabbling at the open window, and then

we beheld the maniac bleeding from his wounded throat, his hair streaming like a meteor, his shirt in a thousand ribbons, his whole appearance calculated to strike terror into the strongest mind. It was evidently his intention to get in. The stout gentleman, speechless with terror, pointed to his umbrella, suspended in the cradle above the seat in which I had placed myself. I seized this weapon, and with the assistance of my new companion, managed to push the intruder with such violence, that, after a tremendous struggle, he was obliged to loose his hold of the door-handle, and seize the umbrella instead. Then we instantly let go of it, and the wretched man tumbled backwards off the train."

Here the narrator finished his story and the brandy and water.

"Then the poor madman must, I fear, have met his death?" said I.

"It is impossible to say for certain," replied the nervous passenger with a shudder. "A skeleton, grasping the wires of an umbrella, *was* discovered years afterwards in a peat bog at the exact spot where the accident happened; but I never feel quite safe from meeting him again."



THE WIFE'S SECRET.

FI pride myself upon any mental endowment whatever, it is upon that humble one of Common Sense. I live what is called by the intellectual people a conventional life. I have my pew in the neighbouring church, and sit in it twice every Sunday. I know one captain in the army—just such a person as he should be—polished, and yet ferocious, gentle to ladies, but rather insolent to civilian males, boastful of his clubs, and giving all his leisure time, which is considerable, to the cultivation of his moustaches ; but otherwise I am ignorant of the fashionable world and all its gay doings. I have made no endeavour to break through the gilded pale that separates it from the steady-going middle class to which I belong. I do

not understand the feeling which prompts my superiors to be ashamed of being seen in an omnibus. Once every day I return from the City in a yellow one : and if it is wet, I use the same conveyance in the morning to reach my office. I pay my tradesmen weekly. My best sherry is 48s. a dozen ; and when the captain talks of vintage wines (as he will do by the hour at my table), I often wonder what he thinks he is drinking. However, with true good-breeding, he imbibes it in great quantities, as though it were the best. I do not keep a man-servant. Our cook cannot compass an *omelette soufflée*. My wife trims her own bonnets. We have eight children, who all know the Church Catechism by heart, except the baby and the last but one. In short, a more respectable and unfashionable family than our own does not exist in all Bayswater.

Under these circumstances, it may be easily imagined that we are as free from the vices of the Great as we are without their Privileges ; and this was, I honestly believe, the case until within a very recent period. When I used to read in the papers that the Lady Day Coltay (of Norman ancestry and bluest blood) had left her husband's roof, and fled with Major Flutterby of the Life Guards ; or that it was rumoured among well-informed circles that the gentlemen of the long robe would

soon find employment in the domestic affairs of his Grace the Duke of Belgravia, I used to give a prolonged whistle, and remark : “Here they are again,” in general reference to the habits of the *haut ton*. I knew that our hereditary aristocracy were given to these escapades, which in my own rank of life would certainly be crimes, and I perused such details as the press could furnish with an avidity unalloyed, I am afraid, with much reprobation. I seemed to be reading of a class of persons whose way of life was too far removed from my own to affect me, except as a spectator ; just as when I went to the play I found myself in an atmosphere of intrigue, and misunderstanding, and jealousy, altogether unreal, and with which I had not the ghost of an experience in common.

Jealousy ! Why, I had been married sixteen years without entertaining that passion, so that it was not very likely, however well acted, that that passion should entertain *me*. Misunderstanding ! The thing was impossible, for whenever there promised to be “a row in the pantry”—and every married man will understand me when I make use of that metaphorical expression—I brought it to a head, and had it out, and off we started again (speaking for self and Mrs. R.) on the smooth current of our lives, with the little fracas buried for ever

in its depths. As for the mother of eight falling in love with another man—it is all very well in a stage-play, and particularly (with all deference to Miss Anna Dickenson) where the husband is a black man, and, as I have said, befitting enough among persons of quality; but upon the Notting Hill side of Bayswater any such mischance would, I felt, be out of place, and ridiculous—a social presumption, as well as a grave domestic crime. Imagine, therefore, my astonishment when my opposite neighbour, Peabody, who also calls himself my friend, did me the honour to call upon me a few weeks ago, to speak, in confidence, of the alarming conduct of my wife. Having demanded and obtained a private interview, this scandalous old person, who was once an indigo-merchant, and yet retains the trace of his calling upon his nose, set before me in detail a number of curious circumstances connected with the “goings on,” as he was pleased to call them, of my wife, which he was not, indeed, prepared to say, “might not possibly be only coincidences, after all,” but which he felt it his duty as a fellow-creature, and one who had been a husband in his time—here his lips made a dumb motion of gratitude—to let me know. Even as a neighbour, and an inhabitant of a common Crescent, hitherto remarkable for its respectability, and which, as I doubtless remembered, had

declined to permit Mrs. Jones to put up *Apartments* in her window, lest we should be confounded with the lodging-house localities ; nay, which, by the mere force of its public opinion, had prevented No. 484 from being let to a playactor—even in this character, said Peabody, he would have felt it his duty to make me aware of what was being said, though doubtless falsely, respecting the behaviour of Mrs. R. Here I should have locked the door, and informed Peabody that his last hour was certainly arrived, and that he had better make his peace with Providence before I cut his throat ; but from ignorance of the proper conduct to be adopted in such exceptional circumstances, and perhaps from the knowledge that there was nothing but a paper-knife in the room with which to effect this righteous punishment, I only burst out laughing, and called him a meddling and impertinent old fool.

“Very true,” returned he, for he always makes use of that form of words—“very true ; but still the facts are worth investigating, even from their singularity. Do you know, for instance, that at eleven o’clock, three days a week, your wife goes out in a cab by herself ?”

“No,” said I, “I do not ; though, if she does, it is surely better than if she had any ineligible companion. As a matter of fact, however, she does not do so, for I

have offered to go shopping with her twice this week, and she has declined to accompany me upon the ground of having a sore throat."

"Upon what days did she give this excuse?" enquired Peabody, taking out his pocket-book.

"Last Monday and last Thursday," returned I.

"Well, here's a memorandum : *Monday 4th. Saw Mrs. R. start, as usual at 11; Thursday, 7th, ditto, ditto.* She could not be going to a morning concert, because she had no white gloves on."

"I will grant that much," quoth I sardonically, and yet not by any means unmoved by this unexpected unintelligence. "My wife does not go to morning concerts."

"Very true," observed Peabody. "Then the question arises, where *does* she go to? Now, as an inhabitant of the Crescent——"

"Peabody," interrupted I severely, "I acknowledge the right of no man—no, not of the man in the moon himself—to meddle in my affairs upon *that* ground. I am obliged to you for the interest you have taken in this matter, but the simple fact is, that it has been entirely misplaced. I have been perfectly well aware of my wife's movements and they have had my fullest permission and approbation. I only wanted to see to what

lengths your impertinence and love of interference would carry you. That is your hat, I believe ; your umbrella is the alpaca one ; I wish you a very good-morning."

I ushered my visitor out, and then sat down in my private parlour with my elbows upon the table, and both my hands thrust into my hair. I had temporarily extinguished Peabody, but I was on fire with jealous apprehensions myself. What *could* it all mean ? For sixteen years my wife had never taken any excursion unless in my company, upon which, she had always given me to understand, she doted ; and yet, after refusing to go out with me upon Monday and Thursday last, on the plea of sore throat, she had started, the instant that my back was turned, in a Hansom—or even supposing it was a four-wheeler—in a cab, without white gloves on, and— Confound it, here *was* a row in the pantry, and one which my peace of mind demanded to have cleared up at once. "Anna Maria," cried I huskily, from the bottom of the stairs—"Anna Maria, I wish to speak with you immediately."

"Lor' bless me," answered my wife from the top story, "it isn't one of the children, is it, John ? Pray tell me the worst at once."

"No, Madam, it is I," replied I stiffly.

"Then it's the kitchen chimney," exclaimed she in a

dogmatic tone. "And didn't I tell Mary to have it swept a week ago: and now the fire-engines will spoil everything, even if we are not burnt out of house and home."

Was it possible that this woman could have deceived me, as Peabody had said, and yet talk so simply of her children, and of house and home? By the time Anna Maria had got down to the drawing-room flight, I began to be rather ashamed of myself. When the mother of eight reached my sitting-room door, with her honest face aglow with animation, and her voice so earnest about the soot, I did not dare to mention what I had in my mind.

"I called you down, dear, to say that I was going to give myself a holiday to-day, and to ask you to come with me to Hampstead Heath, and dine at Jack Straw's Castle this afternoon, it being such a beautiful day."

A ray of joy passed for an instant over her features, and then, as if recollecting herself, she began to stammer that she was very, very sorry, but really she had so much to do about the house just then; if I would only wait till Friday week, which was my birthday, then we would go somewhere, and she should enjoy it above all measure. This afternoon, however, the thing was impossible.

"Well," said I gravely, "we have not many holidays

together, and I am sorry. You had a sore throat on Monday and on Thursday, when I offered you a similar opportunity."

"Oh yes," answered she, shaking her little head, which is very prettily—could it be *too* prettily?—set upon her shoulders; "it was quite impossible that I could go out with that throat."

"Here," thought I, for she could not have gone out *without* her throat, "is some dreadful falsehood; but Peabody may have told it, and not she. Perhaps she never went out at all. Should I not rather believe the wife of my bosom than that scandalous old retired indigo-merchant? Was it not base even to suspect Anna Maria of deception? Doubtless it was; but yet I thought I would just satisfy myself with my own eyes."

"Very well," observed I quietly, "since you cannot come with me to-day, I shall go to the City as usual. I don't care for a holiday by myself."

"Poor, dear fellow," said Anna Maria coaxingly, as she helped me on with my greatcoat, "I am quite grieved to disappoint you. Good-bye, John. Mind you have a good luncheon; it's very bad for you eating those buns and rubbish."

"Ah, what a tangled web we weave," says somebody,

“when first we practise to deceive,” though after but a little trying, there’s nothing easier than lying. I protest I felt like a pickpocket, as I dodged and lurked about our Crescent, watching in the distance my own door, to see whether Mrs. R. would cross the threshold. I suppose I have none of the attributes necessary to the profession of a detective, for whenever a passer-by cast his eyes on me, I felt myself blushing all over, and hanging my head on one side, as a dog hangs his tail. I dared not, of course, stop *in* the Crescent, but loitered at the corner of a street which commanded it, now trying to dig up the tops of the coal-cellars by inserting the nozzle of my umbrella in their circular holes, and now eliciting mournful music by dragging it against the area railings. Exhausted with these exercises, I had been leaning against a lamp-post for about ten minutes, when the door of a house opposite opened suddenly, and a widow lady of vast proportions came swiftly out upon me with her cap-strings streaming in the wind.

“Now just you go away, my gentleman,” said she in a menacing voice, “before the police makes you. *I* know who you’re a-looking for, and *I* can tell you she aint a coming, for I’ve got her locked up in the coal-cellar. *I* know you, although you have not got your red coat on to-day ; and mind—if you get another slice of meat in

my house, I'll prosecute you as sure as my name's Mivins."

"Gracious Heavens, Madam!" cried I, "do you take me for a common soldier?"

"No, Sir," answered she maliciously; "but for a tuppenny-ha'penny Life Guardsman, who never saw a shot fired in his life; and if ever you come after my Jemima again——"

I turned and fled—into the very arms of the abominable Peabody. "Make haste!" exclaimed he; "there is not a moment to be lost. No; the cab is coming this way; you may see for yourself whether I am not right this time."

And sure enough, who should drive by, at a rapid rate, but Anna Maria, in a four-wheeled cab, and without her bonnet, and *with a flower in her hair!* This blow, coming so closely upon the attack of the widow lady, was almost more than I could bear. "Where *can* she be going to?" gasped I half unconsciously. "It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of."

"I have *heard* of similar things," returned Peabody quietly, "although I never experienced anything of the sort myself. Of course, I don't know where she is going to; but the direction she has taken is towards St. John's Wood."

I hastened back to my own house, and with the air of a man who has forgotten something, began to search in the pockets of a greatcoat hanging up in the hall. "By-the-bye," said I, as the servant who had let me in was disappearing, "I think your mistress must have got it after all. Just run up, and tell her I want to see her for a minute."

Emily Jane, who had been in our service ever since we were married, turned as scarlet as her cap-ribbons. "Sir," said she, bolder than brass, "missis has just stepped out; she has taken two of the little girls for a morning walk."

"Which two?" enquired I, looking this abandoned young person full in the face. Her subtle spirit was cowed by this course of procedure; she replied that she did not know—she didn't recollect—she hadn't paid particular attention, but she rather thought that it was the two youngest—all in a breath.

"In that case," rejoined I, pointing with withering scorn to the perambulator, "how comes *this* here? No, Emily Jane; your mistress must have taken out with her to-day the same two children that she took on Monday and on Thursday, when her sore throat was so bad that she could not go out with me."

"Yes, Sir," replied she; "it was the same two."

"Emily Jane," said I solemnly, "always tell the truth. *I know all.* Where is your mistress gone to all by herself to-day, with her hair so neatly arranged, and a flower stuck in the left-hand side of her head? and that after telling me she was too busy to move out. Concealment is worse than useless. Where is she?"

"Wild horses shouldn't do it," returned the domestic resolutely. "I told her I would keep it dark, and I won't betray no confidence as has been repoged in me. You must find it out all of your own head, Sir. Oh dear, oh dear!"

Here, to my confusion, Emily Jane cast her apron, by a sudden and dexterous movement, over her features, and in that blinded condition rushed down the kitchen-stairs like a bull stung by bees.

At that moment, the front-door bell rang with a violence such as none of our visitors, except the captain, ever dare to use. My wretched heart seemed to experience a little throb of joy. He at least then—and I confess my suspicions had been turned in his direction, for was it not his profession to guard us from foreign foes, and to destroy our domestic peace—he at least, I say, *unless there was more than one*—I dared not trust myself to finish the reflection, but opened the front-door with my own hands.

It was somebody in uniform, but not the captain. “*Telegraph* for Mrs. R.,” squeaked the boy in his shrill thin voice; “please to sign on the right-and side.” Then dancing a double shuffle upon the door-step, in order to keep himself warm, he broke forth into ballad, “There’s somebody in the house with Dinah, there’s somebody in the house I *know*; there’s somebody in the house with Dinah——”

I didn’t like his impudence, and I didn’t like his song, but there was nothing for it but to submit. What could Anna Maria be doing with telegraphs? *From Rupert Merrington, 6 Cupidon Villas, St. John’s Wood. Pray, be punctual this time. I am engaged after twelve. I trust you will be looking your best, not pale, as on Monday and Thursday.*

“There’s somebody in the house with Dinah, there’s somebody in the house I *know*——” I rushed out with the receipt in my hand, and the boy snatched it, and took to flight, for he saw that I was dangerous. What could this dreadful message mean? or rather what meaning could it have but one? Rupert Merrington! not at all a steady-sounding name, to begin with: the sender, too, was evidently no business-man, or he would not have exceeded his twenty words so foolishly. It had a military smack all over (and I didn’t like *that* notion—a

military smack!). Merrington was of course an assumed name. The handwriting was good, and so far unlike the captain's; but then people don't write their own telegraph messages. I felt that some immediate action was necessary, or that I should be suffocated. In a couple of minutes I was in a Hansom bound for Cupidon Villas, in a state of mind easier imagined than described; and yet I had often read descriptions of it in novels which professed to describe aristocratic life, and often had seen upon the stage (although principally in farces) the husband racked by jealous pangs.

What had there been to laugh at in that, I wondered now! Why should the tenderest emotions of the human heart be made the subject of buffoon—— But what a wicked-looking set of houses were these which I was now passing! If bricks and mortar — and especially stucco — *can* look vicious, certainly St. John's Wood possesses a patent for——

‘What number, Sir?’ shouted my driver, through the little hole in the roof. “*This* is Cupidon Willas.”

“I am sorry to hear it,” groaned I, passing my pocket-handkerchief over my brow. “Don’t mind me, my good man (for his countenance evinced much dismay at my voice and manner); I know it is not *your* fault that I am miserable. Please to pull up at No. 6.”

Of all the wicked-looking houses in Cupidon Terrace, No. 6 was, it seemed to me, the wickedest. The round eye which formed its staircase window, winked viciously in the sunlight, and in the garden door was a little grating, as though for the purpose of reconnaissance before admittance, which was not a little grating to me. The drawing-room shutters were closed. This latter circumstance gave me some satisfaction, since it might signify that Mr. Merrington was dead, but a glance at the gay attire of the servant-girl who answered my summons cut away this ground of consolation. "Is Mrs. R. within?" enquired I, with a tone of assumed indifference.

"Well—yes, Sir—but you can't see her just at present. Mr. Merrington has a great objection to——"

"Confound Mr. Merrington!" cried I, pushing my way in. "I want to see my wife."

"Oh, your wife is it, Sir?" replied the maid with a giggle. "Then of course you can go up, if you please, although it's as much as my place is worth. You will find them in the drawing-room."

"What! *there?*" exclaimed I passionately, pointing to the closed windows.

"Yes, of course, Sir! That's the room they always sit in."

They *always* sit in? Then this sort of thing must have been going on for years!

I cleared the two little flights of stairs in a couple of bounds, and hurled open the drawing-room door like a catapult.

I found myself in a large apartment, darkened, indeed, upon one side, but well lit by a huge window (invisible from the front of the house) at its northern end. In the centre of the room was a raised structure, hung with purple, and rather resembling a scaffold decorated for the execution of royalty, and upon the scaffold sat my wife in an uncomfortable attitude, and with an expression of countenance that she only wears upon those ceremonious occasions which demand what are called "company manners." Between her and the window stood a gentleman with moustaches, and in a velvet coat—at an easel, and evidently painting her portrait. He elevated his eyebrows at my peculiar mode of entering the room, and looked towards my wife, as if for an explanation of the phenomenon.

"It is only my husband, Mr. Merrington," returned she. "Oh John, I am so sorry that you found me out, for I had meant my picture to be a pleasant surprise to you upon your birthday next week. This was to be my last sitting but one ; and nobody knows the trouble I have taken to keep you ignorant of my coming here. That stupid Emily Jane must have let it out."

"No, my dear," said I ; "I discovered the fact for myself, through the telegraph ; and really I—I couldn't help coming down to see how the picture was getting on. It was so very kind of you. And, dear me, Mr. Merton, what a charming likeness !"

"Well, it's not in a very good light, you see," rejoined he deprecatingly. "Not having a room with a sky-light, I'm obliged to block up those windows, and manage how I can. It makes the house dark, and, I am afraid, caused you to stumble at the drawing-room door."

"Yes," said I, "that was just it ; I very nearly came in head first. I—I only thought I'd look in on my way to the City. I won't interrupt you another moment ; and, indeed, I have myself no time to lose."

I gave the maid five shillings, and—thinking it would be more likely to insure her silence—a chuck under the chin. Then I wrote to Peabody from Bunhill Row (where my place of business is situated), to tell him that I would not make a fool of him any longer ; but the fact was, that, during the last few weeks, I had been making my wife sit for her picture, which he was to come and pass his judgment on as soon as it was finished : there was a question as to whether the flower in her hair was an improvement or not.

But I knew that Emily Jane would tell Anna Maria all

about it. However, nothing was said until my birthday arrived, and with it the portrait, for which the dear creature had saved up her pin-money, and put herself to the greatest inconvenience. I declare my heart smote me for my base suspicions when I looked upon that honest face, which had never worn paint before. Upon that day, she said : “By-the-bye, John, when that telegraph arrived for me from Mr. Merrington, it didn’t make you *jealous* at all, did it ?”

“Oh, dear no, my darling ! Jealous of you ? Impossible ! Not, of course, that you are not beautiful enough to make all the world fall in love with you ; but I never dreamed of such a thing.”

“That’s all right, John,” said she, kissing me ; but there was a wicked twinkle in her kind eyes as she added drily : “I am glad to hear you say that, for, do you know, my dear, I almost thought you *were* just a little jealous.”



EXPLANATION OF THE WATERLOO BRIDGE TRAGEDY.

VY own name is a very common one, and would afford as little satisfaction to the reader in the way of identity as did that of a certain hospitable stranger whom I once met with in a railway carriage. “Sir,” said he, when I quitted his company at a provincial station one hundred and forty miles north of the metropolis, “I am glad to have seen you; I am charmed to have made your acquaintance; my name is Jones; and whenever you come my way—I live at Islington—I shall be most delighted to see you.” Bearing this incident in mind, I forbear to personally introduce my humble self in this narration, which, moreover, does not concern the present writer, except in a secondary degree. The individual to whom it mainly relates is my maternal

uncle, Hector Stuart Macdonald, sometime of Galloway, Esquire, but recently of Tartan Villas, Caledonia Road, N., whose patronymic is a passport anywhere. The latter locality he doubtless chose for his residence, after his retirement from active service, by reason of its nominal association with his native land ; and if it be sarcastically enquired why he did not return to his native land itself, I reply, because he couldn't. A musket-ball had taken a lodging in the shin-bone of his left leg, or somewhere thereabouts, at the battle of Aliwal, and had declined to be ejected ever since ; this forbade the gallant captain's locomotion, and I hope (in charity) exacerbated his temper, which must otherwise have been by nature extremely bad.

At times, when he was free from pain, he was merely hasty and passionate ; but during a paroxysm, Uncle Hector behaved like the Grand Turk. I speak in respect alone of the whirlwind of wrath in which he enveloped himself ; his behaviour to females being always distant, if not respectful, to an extreme degree. He had never married—never been such a fool as to marry, was his own manner of expressing it—and when my father and mother died, he offered me a home for his life, and a competence afterwards, if I should only behave myself like a man who had the Macdonald blood in his veins.

Now, nothing could seem kinder than such an invitation as this to me, who did not understand the condition, and I accepted it with fervour. But then so much was expected of a Macdonald. To submit to be sworn at by the head of the clan ; to listen with patience to the achievements of his ancestors ; to have to provide oneself with every amusement at fivepence per week—for what little money I had was in my uncle's keeping ; to be within doors at nine in summer, and at six in winter, unless by special leave and license ; all this was bitter and irksome enough to a young gentleman of eighteen, who fancied himself quite old enough to be his own master, and who had also some natural spirit, although it might not be neat Macdonald—that genuine, unadulterated Mountain Dew. Nobody can tell how tired I got of the praises of that liquid. Good blood, as a conversational topic, is about as interesting to a person who does not possess much of it, as the laudation of London Stout would be to a teetotaller.

“ Whatever good or great thing has ever been done in this country, be sure of this, boy,” quoth Uncle Hector, “ a Macdonald has been the main-spring. Moreover,” would he continue, “ I am inclined to think that more eminent persons have come out of Galloway than from any other county in Great Britain.”

To this I could only answer, “Indeed,” possessing, as Bradshaw has it, “no information” about that district, except that it produced a certain breed of horses, good of their kind, but not remarkable as winners of the Derby or St. Leger.

This “Indeed,” delivered, I am afraid, with an intentional dryness, would go straight as an arrow to my Uncle Hector’s game leg, and produce a paroxysm. Whether owing to the frequency of these conversations or not, I cannot tell, but the limb got worse and worse, and a jury of doctors being impaneled to sit upon it, delivered it as their opinion that the offending member should be cut off. This verdict the brave old captain received with the greatest coolness : and when the operation took place, declined to be dosed with chloroform, or any such effeminate method of shirking pain, but watched the whole proceedings, not with stoicism indeed, but with a sort of affectionate interest. One of the medical gentlemen was about to convey the leg away, doubtless for the purposes of science ; but my uncle, who had never lost sight of it, bade him let it be, in a voice extremely out of character with a patient suffering from a recent amputation.

“No limb of a Macdonald shall be treated with indignity by a Sawbones,” observed my uncle, when we were

left alone together in company with the precious relic : “and it will be your task, my boy, to see it laid in the burial-ground of our common ancestors.”

“I’m not to take it to Galloway,” cried I, in undisguised alarm.

“But that you certainly are, Sir, and without twenty-four hours’ delay,” returned the patient, with energy. “Why, zounds, Sir, to hear your tone of astonishment, one would think Galloway was at the anti-podes.”

I did not think that, but I certainly had no very accurate idea as to where it was ; and not venturing to say so, I took an early opportunity of looking at the map to discover its exact locality. And here my difficulties began, for look where I would, there was no such place as Galloway in all broad Scotland through. There was a Mull of Galloway, it is true, but even that sounded like a mistake of some kind ; while, as for carrying Uncle Hector’s leg in a brown-paper parcel, all that enormous distance, for the sake of throwing it into the sea—for that was where the Mull seemed to be located—it was really too ridiculous an undertaking. Being totally unable to clear up this matter myself, and fearing to enquire concerning it of my irascible relative, I called upon a young friend who happened to be reading hard for a

Civil Service examination, and therefore would, I knew, be possessed of all sorts of out-of-the-way information, to learn what had become of Galloway. He gave me to understand that that important province, so fecund in eminent individuals, had been erased, doubtless through jealousy, from the list of counties, and was now divided into Kirkcudbright and Wigton.

“The burial-place of our family is in the neighbourhood of Stoneykirk,” observed my uncle, as I sat in his chamber that same evening indulging in the hope that he had repented of his monstrous resolution. “It is a grand old spot by the desolate sea-shore, very different from your spick-and-span London cemeteries, that seem to speak less of mortality than of undertakers’ bills and extortionate ground-rents. I could not have buried my leg down here—in a befitting manner—at a much less expense than it will cost you to go to Scotland; while the comfort to a man of family in adopting the latter course is unspeakable. You will travel by third class, of course; the train starts at 9'15 from Euston Square to-morrow night, and you may be back again at Tartan Villas by Thursday. I shall give you a ten-pound note, of the expenditure of which you will render me an exact account, and then you and I must live economically for the next week or two. It is a sacrifice, how-

ever, to the honour of the family, which I shall never regret."

This was not, however, by any means the view that I myself entertained of the matter. Even supposing the honour of my uncle's family *was* preserved by such a proceeding, why was *I* to be sacrificed to it? When my poor father had the misfortune to blow his little finger off, out shooting, one September, in Shropshire, he did not send me to Kensal Green to see it interred. Why, according to this system, should many accidents involving loss of limb happen to a person of lineage, his burial expenses would form a very serious item in his yearly accounts. It would be really wrong to give way to my uncle's exaggerated notions upon this subject. Besides, it was winter, and ten hours' night-journey by rail, followed by nobody knew how many hours by some Galloway conveyance, drawn by an animal peculiar to the district, and not celebrated for speed, was a very serious consideration. Moreover, the ten-pound note might be spent in a manner infinitely more gratifying to my feelings, and not less so, since he would never know anything about it, to those of my relative. Thus I reasoned with myself, not unnaturally, perhaps, but certainly with dishonesty and meanness. My uncle's demand was a very selfish one, but my pretence of acquiescence was

much more deserving of reprobation. I confess that I played a false and unmanly part in the whole transaction; but I was punished for it, and I punish myself now by relating what I did. Let, therefore, as my respected relative used to express it—Let that flea stick to the wall. On the other hand, it must be conceded, that the mission in question was a most distasteful and unnecessary one, and that ten pounds—which I considered, somehow, as my own property, advanced for once in a decently liberal sum—was a great temptation to one who had to make up a long hiatus of three years of London sight-seeing.

“ You can take the omnibus to Euston Square, as you have so little luggage,” observed my uncle, as the hour drew nigh for my departure; “ but be sure that you never let the carpet-bag that has my leg in it get out of your hand.”

“ Very well, uncle,” returned I, although I did not think that it was an article likely to tempt many fraudulent persons; and accordingly into the 'bus I stepped, laden with this singular treasure, and feeling like a second Mr. Greenacre. At Euston Square, instead of a ticket to Springfield, the station I was nominally bound for, I took a hansom cab to a respectable hotel in Covent Garden; and having engaged a bed-room for a night or two, sallied

out from thence with my carpet-bag to Waterloo Bridge, it being my intention to bury my uncle's leg in the waters of oblivion.

Now, at first sight, nothing would seem easier than to drop a brown-paper parcel at night over a parapet into the Thames ; but, in reality, this is far from being the case. The police are very prying and officious after ten o'clock P.M., and a man can't carry a little luggage about with him without exciting their attention. Moreover, they are not all in uniform, and a passer-by whom you may have set down as a mere inquisitive fellow, is as likely as not to be Constable X, with his suspicions, and the strongest professional objections to your conveying human limbs about in a black carpet-bag. I had, however, found a solitary spot, and was about to take my treasure from its casket for the purpose of putting it through the balustrades, when, all of a sudden, it struck me that the horrid thing would float if not to-day, the next day : or if not that, the day after to-morrow, and that it was absolutely necessary to weight it. Now, again, at first sight, nothing would seem easier than to pick up a stone, and use it for this purpose. But where was I to find a stone ? I could not pick out a flag from the pavement with my pocket-knife, like a second Baron Trenck, without exciting the gravest attention : nor could I, for the same reason, offer

a street-boy half-a-crown to fetch a stone, although he would probably know where to lay his hand upon one in a moment, in case of any opportunity occurring for window-breaking. I had noticed an old woman with a hand-barrow full of apples at the end of the bridge, and I walked towards her with the intention of purchasing a gallon of them, and throwing the thing over in their company ; but being ignorant of all such subjects, I did not know what they might do when they got sodden by the water ; perhaps they would then bob up like corks—indeed, I remembered to have seen an apple floating on some stream or pond—and bring to light the very object which I wanted them to conceal. If I could have got change for a sovereign in half-pence (as Mr. Mantalini threatened to do ere he leaped into the river), and enclosed *them* in the brown-paper parcel, that, indeed, would have been an excellent plan ; but upon what pretence could I ask at the toll-gate—albeit it was the very place for them—for two hundred and forty pennies ! This simple obstacle threatened seriously to interfere with all my plans, until presently I remembered an ironmonger's shop in the Strand, with a quantity of quoits in the window : and arriving at that establishment just before it closed, I bought four couple of them, and carried them home to my hotel.

In the retirement of my bed-room I hurriedly tied the quoits about the—the brown-paper parcel—with string, and then once more sallied forth upon my tremendous errand. The porter eyed me curiously as I again left the house carpet-bag in hand, and perhaps made up his mind that I was robbing the hotel by little and little, and would eventually carry off my bedclothes neatly rolled up in the same receptacle. The policemen were more suspicious of me than ever, it being nearly midnight; and “Oh,” thought I, “if that suspicion ever rises to the exercise of right of search, how *can* I account for the possession of Uncle Hector’s leg, with three pair of quoits wrapped round it with the precipitation of guilt!” However, I reached the bridge in safety, and selecting a time when I found myself comparatively alone, I opened the carpet-bag, and threw the parcel into the black and swift-flowing river. I could see nothing; but a sharp cleaving of the waters, followed by a dull thud, informed me that the quoits had preceded the limb which it was their mission to have kept under, until the famous New Zealander should have fished for it from the ruined arches, or, in other words, for ever. At the same moment, a tall form, emerging from a recess upon my left, laid his hand on my shoulder, and enquired sharply: “What was that, young man, you have just thrown into the river?”

“Bones and old iron,” replied I, with the ingenuity of despair.

“Perhaps,” quoth the policeman drily, turning his bull’s-eye upon my terrified countenance, “and also perhaps not.”

“There is nothing that forbids rubbish to be shot here,” observed I audaciously.

“And therefore your personal safety is by no means secure,” returned the officer grimly. “I shall know you again, young fellow, among ten thousand ; so, if anything turns up down stream to-morrow morning, look out—that’s all *I* say.”

That was all he did say, but it was more than enough for me. Here was a charming beginning for my proposed holiday. “If such be the boasted sweetness of stolen pleasures, give me a moderate sorrow, honestly come by, in its stead,” thought I. I had looked forward to going to the theatre at half-price that very night ; but I was in no humour now for any description of dramatic performance. If there had been yet a train for the north that night, I verily believe I should have set out for Galloway after all, and buried something or other in the ancestral resting-place, in humble reparation for the wrong which I had done to Uncle Hector.

The next morning was too late for such a course, since

even the small deductions of the price of a bed at the hotel and no supper (for appetite I had none) had left my exchequer too impoverished for the journey. The ten-pound note was not adapted for any extras, and the cheap train did not start till night again. There was nothing left for me, therefore, but to enjoy myself. I could not ask a friend to join me in any diversion, because I did not dare let it be known that I was in town ; nay, although I knew very few people, wherever I went I was afraid of meeting some acquaintance. I spent a few wretched hours at the Lowther Arcade, and then wandered into the British Museum. No suicide has, I believe, yet been committed in that national establishment, but let me tell the custodians thereof, that an incident of that description was never nearer happening upon their premises than on the occasion in question. My uncle had obtained leave of absence for me from the house of business in the City where I was engaged daily ; and he would have been certain to hear of my not having taken advantage of it, else I would gladly have done my work there as usual, and so passed some of the lingering hours. I did go to the theatre that evening ; but before the performance commenced, I caught sight of my friend of the (*in prospectu*) Civil Service in the pit, and precipitately left the building. *He* was taking well-earned re-

creation in the company of his family after a long day's toil; I was endeavouring to lose in fictitious scenes the consciousness of having deceived my only relative, and thrown his revered leg into the river Thames. I don't suppose a four days' holiday was ever passed so miserably by any human being before or since; I had plenty of time to make up a narrative to hoodwink simple Uncle Hector. My description of Galloway scenery, culled from the best geographies, almost drew tears into his eyes, it was so graphic. He had fortunately not been in his native land for half a century; and when I went a little wrong in local colouring, he ascribed it to the effects of change. The churchyard by the sea was, of course, a little difficult to describe, and was represented after the Socratic method by question and answer, the former largely predominating. But the aged sexton—a concerted piece arranged from *Old Mortality*—was really a great creation, and satisfied Uncle Hector's highest expectations.

“Why, dear me, old David must be—ay, he must be a hundred and two,” quoth my uncle reflectively.

“He must be every bit of that, Sir,” said I: “I never beheld anyone so venerable.”

“There is certainly no place to live in—or to live so long in—as dear old Galloway,” sighed the veteran. “It

is scarcely worth while to go home for such a little while as is left me upon earth ; but, see, boy, when I am gone, that the rest of my bones are laid where you have——”

The rest of this dreadful sentence, which had already stung my conscience like a scorpion, was interrupted by one of those newsmen who infest the suburbs.

“Murder—Murder and Mutilation !” screamed he at the top of his voice ; “found in the river Thames, a portion of a human body.”

“What is that he’s saying ?” enquired my uncle with curiosity.

“It’s American news,” said I, “that’s all ; the Latest Information.”

“I thought he said ‘Murder ;’ yes, it *is* Murder. Now run out and buy it of him, boy, but be sure you don’t give him more than a halfpenny.”

I bought the broadsheet, but I didn’t show it to my uncle, remarking, with the deception that had now, alas, become habitual to me, that the vendor wanted a shilling for it. It had a wood-cut of Uncle Hector’s limb, but not at all like ; and detailed with great particularity the manner of its separation before death, by means of some blunt instrument, from the body of a lovely female, the rest of whose remains were being diligently sought for by the police. They were already in possession of

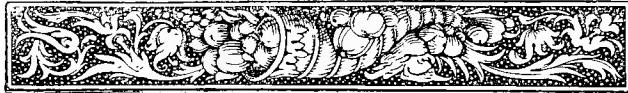
certain facts which could not fail to bring the perpetrator of this awful crime to justice. In the meantime, the metropolis was aghast with terror, and wild with indignation.

I never moved out of Tartan Villas for the next six weeks. The remark of that policeman: "I shall know you again, young fellow, among ten thousand, if anything turns up down-stream," rang perpetually in my ears, and gave me influenza, colic, rashes that might be scarlatina—but which were really produced by a small tooth-comb—and, in short, a succession of such diseases as keep one within doors. At the end of the sixth week, I did venture forth for a day or two, but had a relapse from reading a sensation leader in the *Daily Telegraph*, taunting Sir Richard Mayne with the immunity which the authors of the Waterloo Bridge Tragedy had experienced. "The blood of that injured girl," it said, "cried aloud, but in vain, for justice, and for the young man with the black carpet-bag!"

I am thankful to say that Uncle Hector never suspected that he himself was the cause of all this excitement. His leg had multiplied itself into so many limbs before he began to read about it, that a much more suspicious person than he would not have entertained a misgiving. His honest heart would have dismissed the

notion that his own flesh and blood—his nephew, not his leg, I mean—could have so deceived him, with a noble scorn. The evil I had done him wrought this good, that ever afterwards, I behaved dutifully and well towards the veteran, and never thought I could do enough for him in the way of expiation and repentance. In return, his harshness of manner was greatly mitigated: and before his death, there was not a nephew in London who had a more genuine reverence for his uncle than had I for the old soldier, whose prejudices were, after all, immensely outweighed by his sterling worth, and whose undemonstrativeness more than counterbalanced by the solid benefits he conferred. When the rest of Uncle Hector was “cut off,” I did not commit his remains to the same place—in accordance with his literal instructions—as had received his leg, but carried them faithfully to Galloway, and saw them interred where it was the old man’s desire to lie.

And this is the true history of the Waterloo Bridge Tragedy, which, after all, had but one leg to rest upon, and even that by no means a sound one.



HOW I GOT RID OF BOODLE.

“**M**OU scaly varmint, you know how to lay out *your* money, *you do*,” observed the driver of a Hansom cab to his late fare, as the latter was endeavouring to ascend the stately steps of the *Megatherium* club-house with dignified unconsciousness. “Why, blessed if I didn’t think, by your white choker, as though you was a parson; but you’re nothing better than a tub-ranter.—Don’t *you* speak to him, Sir (here he raised his voice), for he’s no gentleman, I do assure you.” This last sentence was addressed to myself, who was standing at the top of the steps in question, and a very embarrassing remark it was. I had not the least intention of speaking to the person alluded to, who was indeed an utter stranger

to me ; but having been thus maliciously invoked, I could not afford even a tacit encouragement to such observations ; so I waved my hand to the cabman in sign that his presence was obnoxious, and smiled upon the approaching stranger, as though I would say : “Never mind, Sir ; this is the sort of insolence which all men who ride in cabs are more or less subject to.”

“Sixpence from Temple Bar !” continued the driver, proclaiming with vehemence the heinous crime of the accused. “I believe he expects to go to Pairodice for sixpence.—Don’t you never let him belong to your club, Sir, mind *that*.”

It now became absolutely necessary, as a member of the *Megatherium*, that I should speak a word of condolence to this stranger, upon the treatment to which he had been subjected at our very doors, and I did so. He returned his thanks in a manner the courteousness of which rather increased my sympathy for his position, and then pushed open the folding-doors.

“Now, don’t you let him into your club, Sir,” repeated the cabman with great earnestness, and making no sort of preparation for moving away ; “for he’s a scaly varmint, if ever there was one.”

Unwilling to be the recipient of these extreme opinions, I myself withdrew into the club, and was about to

proceed up stairs, when I heard my own name mentioned.

"*That* is Mr. Charles Selby," observed the hall-porter, in reply to some observation of the stranger. "The other Mr. Selby's initials are F. R."

"I did not know his Christian name," replied the newcomer; "but I suppose that Mr. F. R. Selby is the gentleman I am in search of. Can you favour me with his present address?"

As the porter seemed to have some difficulty in supplying the information required, I turned back at once, and said: "If you want my Cousin Frank's direction, I can give it you, Sir;" and I did so, and he wrote it down in his pocket-book. He was a thin spare man, with shaggy brows overhanging hard gray eyes; and, indeed, there was a general air of severity about him, which did not promise much in the way of extra sixpences to cabmen, or volunteer gratuities of any kind; but his voice was singularly soft, and his air engaging. He again thanked me; and I left him rather pleased that I had done so grateful a fellow-creature a civility, but never expecting to look upon his iron-gray countenance any more. My astonishment, therefore, was considerable when, a few weeks afterwards, I received the following letter from my Cousin Frank, who is connected with a foreign house in the City:

“DEAR CHARLES—I have just been telegraphed to Riga. There is one thing which you can do for me, if you will, in my absence—get Boodle into the *Megatherium*. Substitute your name, as his proposer, instead of mine, and make what whip you can. He is a warm man, and useful to us here. You have already some slight acquaintance with him, it seems,* so it will be the more easy for you to oblige in this matter, your affectionate kinsman—

“F. R. SELBY.”

“* P.S. He says you behaved very courteously to him once, about a cabman.”

But for that postscript, I should never have conjectured who Mr. Boodle was. The description would not have helped me to recognise him. I should not have thought he had been a “warm” man, but rather the reverse. I don’t think I should have even considered him a “clubable” man, as the great lexicographer terms it; but this recommendation from my cousin was final upon that point. He would surely never have asked me to introduce a man into the *Megatherium* solely because he was an advantageous commercial connection.

As the ballot was to come on in three weeks, and three candidates out of four had been black-balled at the last

election through certain cliquish influences, there was no time to be lost if Boodle was to be brought in. I therefore called upon him at his residence in Tyburnia, and announced my intentions in his favour. I was quite as unpleasantly impressed with his personal appearance as before ; while his manner struck me as more plausible than genuinely courteous ; and every subsequent interview strengthened my prejudice against him, until it grew to positive antipathy. In the course of my canvass, too, I heard ugly stories about Boodle. It was very true that he was rich, very rich ; but he had not come by his money in a satisfactory manner. Slyboots of the *Megatherium*, justly celebrated for knowing more about other people's affairs than any old woman in England, confided to me, the day after he had revealed it to about forty members in the smoking-room, that Boodle, who had been managing-clerk to Foodle, the great banker, had got upon his blind side, just before his death, and persuaded him to leave him all his money, instead of to his rightful heirs ; and Kiteflyer, of the Chancery bar, who knew one of the rightful heirs, reduced by this nefarious transaction to follow the profession of a billiard-marker in the Regent's Circus, corroborated this statement, with many horrid details. I found out for myself that this money, so ill acquired, was clung to by Boodle with a tenacity that no words can express—

that he was a scrub, a snob, a skinflint—and, in fact, when the cabman had designated him “a scaly varmint” he had enunciated a great truth. I acknowledged the wisdom of his warning words : “Never let him get into your club, mind *that*,” with all my heart. It was bad enough to belong to the same society, to share the same roof-tree, to dine in the same dining-hall as Boodle. But, worse than this, I could not personally get rid of him. I had become necessary, as it appeared, to this extremely unpleasant person’s existence. It was “My very dear Sir,” and “My excellent friend Selby,” whenever we met, and we met every day. He called at the club, on his return from the City, as regularly as five o’clock came round, to enquire how his canvass was going forward, and I had to report real progress. I had gone too far to retreat now. My personal reputation was involved in getting Boodle in, and I was determined to go through with it. I had put myself under obligations for his sake, which I should not have incurred for a real friend ; for I could not say : “Here is a social acquisition to the *Megatherium*, in Boodle, and I make no apology in asking you to vote for him.” On the contrary, I had to request, as a particular favour, of everybody not to black-ball Boodle. It got whispered about the club (and Slyboots was so good as to let me know it), that this fellow had lent me money ;

I was supposed to be Boodle's debtor ; his instrument ; his cat's-paw. Kiteflyer took me aside in the card-room one day, and told me confidentially where money was to be got at fourteen per cent. : "Paid neither in wine nor pictures," said he, "but in hard cash."

"And why the dickens, Captain Kiteflyer," replied I, with indignation, "do you make this uninteresting revelation to *me*? Do you suppose that *my* credit is at the same miserable——"

"My dear fellow," interrupted the captain, twirling his moustaches, "don't be offended, and still more don't offend *me*. Only understanding that Boodle and you were—— it's a very disagreeable relation for a man to stand in with a member of his own club, let me tell you ; and if Boodle is to come amongst us——"

Here, I suppose, I gave expression to some feeling of impatience, for old Martinet at the whist-table laid down his cards, and cried out that his memory had clean gone for the day with the noise I made.

"You see," pursued Kiteflyer coolly, "it looks so extremely odd *proposing* a man like Boodle."

Under these circumstances, it may be easily imagined that my unpleasant protégée became an object not only of dislike, but loathing. His meanness, his plausible manners, above all, his demonstrations of friendship, began to

engender within me an undying hatred, though not unmixed with terror. If he *did* get into the *Megatherium* (and I had made the matter almost a certainty by my unremitting exertions), how was I ever to shake him off again? Were the arms of this Old Man of the Sea to be about my neck for ever and ever? Would he wring my hand in the library, before Slyboots and Kiteflyer, and the rest of them, while they winked to one another over their coffee, and whispered: "He's been borrowing again," night after night, until my constitution gave way under it, and I died of Boodle. If he was so odious as a Stranger—as an individual admitted to the advantages of the club by sufferance—how ten times more hateful would be his vulgar familiarity when he became a member thereof when the billiard-room should be no longer a sanctuary, nor the smoking-room a refuge, but the trail of the Boodle would be over it all. A number of expedients suggested themselves, all more or less impracticable, but none of them discarded from my mind merely because of their violent nature.

I would have done *anything* to rid myself of this incubus; to avert this coming evil, the shadow of which was already darkening all my being.

Should I telegraph to my cousin at Riga, "Boodle's a beast," and take his name off the list of candidates at

the last moment? No, I could not do it; my character for moral courage and social popularity was at stake, for it was not everybody who would have ventured to propose Boodle, or who had a sufficient following of friends to insure his admittance. Should I let him come in, and then poison him, by the assistance of the cook? He was a Frenchman, and would therefore probably do anything for a bribe; yes, poison him in one of his cheap dishes (for Boodle would never order a dear one), and cause the wretch to expire in agonies while haggling over the bill.

I derived, however, no comfort from these wild designs, which had little perhaps beyond their object to recommend them; and into our club Boodle came. Nobody had ever had so many black-balls before, and yet been elected; but the "scaly varmint"—Cabman, I thank thee for that name—did get in; and all the evil that I had foreseen came to pass in consequence. Boodle, who knew nobody else in all the *Megatherium*—for his seconder left the country after he was admitted, and *that* was a very curious coincidence, to say the least of it, and made me very suspicious of the Riga journey—this Boodle, I say, knowing nobody else in all the club *but* me, became my shadow, my *alter ego*, my Siamese twin. I was as gruff and

insolent to him as my gentle nature would permit me, partly from disgust, and partly to show Slyboots and the rest that I was not afraid of him ; but they only observed to one another that Boodle was certain to put on an additional premium when poor Selby wanted renewal ; while the new-made member himself took all my ill-treatment like a spaniel. We had no tastes, ideas, or pursuits in common (I am glad to say), and therefore, although he sought my society, there was little conversation between us. He sat looking at me very much as if I belonged to him, which indeed the majority of my acquaintance imagined I did. By way of something unpleasant to say, more than with any other object, I happened upon one of those occasions to observe : “ By-the-bye, Boodle, you haven’t given your house-dinner yet.”

“ My house-dinner ! ” replied he, with an alacrity which he always showed when his pocket was threatened ; although he was generally dull and slow as a stone. “ Why should I give a house dinner ? ”

“ Why, because you are now a member of the *Megatherium*, Sir,” responded I coolly. “ Of course, you needn’t do it unless you like. If you prefer to act otherwise than as every other gentleman acts, who, by the kind exertions of his friends, has become elected here, you are of course at liberty to do so.”

"Now don't be so impatient, my very dear Sir," returned he in his wheedling manner. "You know I am quite unacquainted with this sort of life. I dare say I can afford things as well as most of you—better than some perhaps"—[the "scaliness" of the "varmint" had never struck me so forcibly as when he was making these observations]; "but it is not 'light come, light go' with *my* money, who have had to make my own way in the world. Now, if it is really necessary to give this dinner to those to whose support I am chiefly indebted——"

"It is not necessary, Mr. Boodle."

"But, my very dear Sir, if it would be exceptional not to do so."

"It would be very exceptional," returned I; and I hope I may be forgiven, under the circumstances, for the slight exaggeration. "Nay, Sir, it would be unparalleled."

"How many—that is, how few?—I mean, *who* ought to be invited?"

"Oh, about forty of your principal supporters," said I: "forty or fifty would be the extreme limit."

"Fifty people to dinner!" gasped the astounded Boodle. "But what a frightful tax."

"If, Mr. Boodle," said I, rising with dignity, "you

consider it a tax to entertain your friends, I think it almost a pity that you should have become a member of a society where such sentiments——”

“Now, my very dear Sir,” interrupted Boodle, growing pale, and bedewed with perspiration, “pray, be patient, pray, be calm. I don’t know anything about giving dinner-parties—that is, at least [correcting himself], anything about a house-dinner at a club. There must, I suppose, be soup and fish.”

“Forgive me, Mr. Boodle,” said I, “but these disgusting details—I cannot listen to what you are going to set before your guests; the house-steward is the proper person with whom to settle these arrangements.”

“Dear me,” observed Mr. Boodle, biting his nails, “what a fuss about a little dinner! Can’t I write out a list of things as one does every day?”

“Certainly not, ‘like one does every day,’ Mr. Boodle. The cook, remember, has a reputation to risk as well as yourself. You may do just as you please, of course; but there is also a third person whose reputation is somewhat at stake”—and here I patted my chest in a manner that for dignity has not been surpassed, I fancy, in the House of Commons since the times of Mr. Burke.

“Well, really,” muttered the awe-struck Boodle, “you

seem to know so much about it : and since the thing must be done, perhaps *you* will be good enough to order this house-dinner *for me?*"

The smouldering embers of vengeance leaped up in my heart a tongue of flame, fanned by these welcome words. I could hardly quench the triumph in my eyes, or school my voice (which would have cried: "Mine enemy, I have thee on the hip !") down to its former dispassionate tone.

"Just as you please, Mr. Boodle. If it will save you trouble, I shall be happy to see the house-steward, and order your dinner. Shall we appoint—to-day is the first—the thirtieth of the month, so as to get no refusals?"

The poor wretch winced as though I had flicked him with a wet towel, as we used to do at Eton. "I don't think you need ask more than forty-five," continued I ; "house-dinner for five-and-forty on the thirtieth instant. See, I have made a note of it ; would you be kind enough to put your initials to it, by way of authorisation ? I'll see the steward to-morrow."

Never was B. B. (his name was Benjamin) attached with greater unwillingness to any document ; never was any signature accepted with greater joy by assignee, and buttoned up in an inside pocket.

I saw the house-steward before breakfast the next morning, lest the “scaly” Boodle should have “slept upon it,” and endeavour to disavow the transaction.

“Mr. Goodfare,” said I, “I am requested by Mr. Boodle to order a house-dinner for five-and-forty.”

“Indeed, Sir!” Mr. Goodfare elevated his eyebrows, and no wonder. “Mr. Boodle is unfortunate in his time of year. Everything is exceedingly dear in January.”

“That is not of the slightest consequence,” remarked I coolly. “No limit is enjoined as to expense whatever.”

“Very good, Sir. Then the repast is to include every luxury?”

“Every luxury that money can buy,” returned I emphatically; and then we went into the details. I ordered a banquet which Lucullus would have smacked his lips at, and after which Vitellius himself could not have wanted more. As for the wines, there is a certain bin in the *Megatherium* cellar which was stocked from Metternich’s own vineyard a quarter of a century ago, when the club happened to be in very flourishing circumstances, and the contents of which are now valued at £2 14s. 6d. *a bottle*; well, Boodle’s house-dinner made a tremendous hole in that bin.

“I hope Mr. Boodle is very rich,” observed the

smiling house-steward with reference to this Johannisberg.

“Very rich,” said I; “and he has been saving up for this entertainment for many years. What have you got for dessert?”

“Well, Sir, really nothing: nothing, that is, but such extravagant items as pine-apples at four guineas apiece.”

“Four pine-apples,” said I quietly, “at the very least. There must, of course, be plenty of peaches.”

“Well, really, Sir, Lord Guzzleton was dining here yesterday, and had made out his *carte* a month ago for peaches, yet we had to send to Paris, and they cost eight-and-sixpence apiece, besides the carriage.”

“Write down six dishes of peaches,” said I calmly, “and let them be very fine ones.”

Upon the whole, I ordered Boodle a good dinner. Directly I had accomplished this duty, I took the train into the wilds of Cornwall, and from thence sent out Mr. Boodle’s invitations in his own name. I did not leave my address—so that no change in the arrangements might possibly be made—nor did I appear in town myself until the day of the entertainment. In the meantime I lived sparingly upon homely food, in order to have an appetite for the coming Apician meal. I fed

upon *Cotelettes à la Vengeance*, mutton-chops made piquant by the thoughts of my great revenge.

It came at last, and I enjoyed it amazingly. Course after course, and every course with its appropriate wine ! Luxury after luxury ! Unimaginable dishes from every quarter of the globe. Bursts of irrepressible applause accompanied the appearance of these unwonted delicacies. Everybody was congratulating Mr. Benjamin Boodle upon his princely munificence. Everybody drank his health in the wine which was five shillings and twopence *a glass*. I sat at the host's right hand, and watched him smile his acknowledgments. I shall never forget his smile. We could have very well dispensed with ice, as likewise with lemon-juice, at that end of the table. "What shall I have to pay for all this ?" was the thought which, with rage against me, his humble servant—the mere agent and almoner of his bounty — divided his mind.

He never spoke to me ; he only looked at me with an expression more eloquent than words. I don't know what the bill came to ; I did not venture to ask the house-steward what the five-and-forty cost Boodle per head ; but it must have been a good round sum in three figures. Boodle's house-dinner is talked of even now. Not that he has been known to speak of it himself for it

is a subject beyond measure distasteful to him. But young members, who wonder to see the rich man feed so parsimoniously every day, are told the story with nods and winks innumerable, and listen with explosive bursts of laughter. From that great day of vengeance until now, my quondam persecutor has ceased to annoy me ; Boodle and I never speak. My friends conceive that I must have repaid him all that money in which they supposed I was once indebted to him. But I don't care what they think ; I have got rid of Mr. Benjamin Boodle.

THE END.

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